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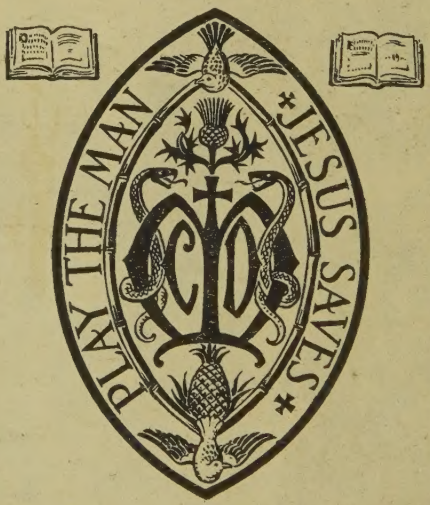

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SOME WORDS OF CHRIST

Sermons

ON

Some Words of Christ

BY

H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D.

LATE CANON AND CHANCELLOR OF ST. PAUL'S

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With one exception, all the Sermons in this volume were preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, and nearly all were preached during Dr. Liddon's autumnal period of residence. They represent, therefore, a part of the teaching which, when no great festivals, no special season of the Christian year, controlled his choice of subjects, he prepared for a congregation whose wants and capacity he seemed to know with peculiar insight. And they illustrate, in their concentration of thought upon the Words of Christ, that characteristic of Tractarian theology which has been marked by Dean Church: "The great Name stood no longer for an abstract symbol of doctrine, but for a living Master, Who could teach as well as save. And not forgetting whither He had gone and what He was, the readers of Scripture now sought Him eagerly in those sacred records, where we can almost see and hear His going in and out among men."

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SERMON I.

THE WORDS OF CHRIST.

St. Matt. xxiv. 35.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.

THE question whether these solemn words should be closely, or rather exclusively, connected with those which precede or those which follow them, is a question of practical and not merely literary interest. The saying occurs in the middle of our Lord's great prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the end of the world—two events which, it is plain from an examination of the whole discourse, were very distinct from each other in the mind of our Lord, although at this time they would have been closely connected, perhaps even identified, in the minds of the disciples. He, the Divine Speaker, knew, as He surveyed the centuries stretching away before Him, that Jerusalem would be destroyed before the then living generation had passed to its account; while the time of the last world-embracing catastrophe, in a much more distant future, was known neither to men nor angels, but only to the Father in heaven. And thus His saying, "My words shall not pass away," may have been partly intended to be remembered, some forty years after, when Jerusalem would have perished, while the end of the world would not yet have come. It may have been a provision against a moment of disappointment which He then foresaw, and for which He thus provided a proof that He had foreseen it, and that He was still certain of the future.

But that this was the main object of the words can be affirmed with less certainty than would be the case if our Lord had deigned to become Incarnate in the Western world, and was speaking as a Western, whether Greek or Roman, to Western men. A Western discourse, if it is to be persuasive, is like a living creature; every part of it is organically connected with the rest; and in dealing with any one of its several parts we have a right to presume fully on this connection. But an Eastern discourse is as often as not a collection of sayings which have the loosest connection with each other; which are intended to do their work of persuasion, as it might be done by an assortment of epigrams or proverbs; which resemble in their entirety, not a living organism, but a heap of polished stones, each of which is in itself perfect and beautiful, while it has no necessary connection with the rest. Compare the Suras or discourses in the Koran of Mohammed with the speeches of the celebrated Greeks reported in Thucydides, or with the orations of Cicero, or with the parliamentary utterances of a great statesman in our own day, and you will see what I mean:—in the one there is scarcely any traceable method or connection; in the other all is connected, with a view to producing on the mind the effect of a highly organised argument. St. Paul indeed was an Eastern by birth, but the incidents of his education and life, and the requirements of his work, made him more than half a Western; and thus the Epistle to the Romans, to go no further, is largely constructed upon the methods and modes of thought which belong to the Greek and Western world. But our Lord, in His condescension, addressed, first of all, Eastern audiences, while keeping His eye upon that larger and world-wide audience which would wait on Him throughout the coming centuries; He spoke to men as an Eastern man would speak, and therefore it is impossible to assume that close and exclusive

connection between one sentence in His discourses and another, which would be natural in a speaker of the Western world.

This observation would be pedantic in a sermon, if it were not justified by the practical result to which it at once conducts us. For, if it is accurate, we see at once that we cannot assume, between the words of the text and the words which precede and which follow them, any such close and exclusive connection as would oblige us to suppose that our Lord was thinking only or mainly of what He was teaching about the destruction of Jerusalem and about the end of the world. "My words shall not pass away." As He utters the saying, the horizon widens; it widens so as to include the whole range of the words of Christ. "My words shall not pass away." As He utters the saying, we feel that, if it is not irreverent to say as much, this is one of His most commanding and inclusive utterances; that in it His lofty consciousness of His Divine Person, and of His world-redeeming work, is most clearly exhibited.

Our Lord here contrasts the permanence, the indestructibility, of His words with the perishable nature of the material universe. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." This contrast was familiar to the Jewish mind, and it would have been understood to claim for our Lord's teaching the highest imaginable authority. Jeremiah had said of God's covenants with David and with the Levites, that they were as unalterable as the succession of day and night:

> "Thus saith the Lord,
> If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night,
> And that there should not be day and night in their season;
> Then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, . . .
> And with the Levites the priests, My ministers."[1]

In later years, leading Rabbis of Palestine and the great

[1] Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21.

Jewish Alexandrian writer Philo had taught constantly that the Law as a whole differed from the material world in being unchangeable and imperishable. Philo, in particular, maintained that if the letter of the Law had in any respect to be surrendered, the spirit which it enshrined belonged to pure and indestructible truth. And our Lord sanctioned this teaching, though in a far higher sense, by repeating it Himself.

When, in the Sermon on the Mount, He is going to show how the Law would have a loftier meaning in the Church of Christ than ever before, He begins by deprecating the common Jewish misapprehension that He was attempting to abolish it. "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."[1] And then He adds: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."[2] Again, when after the parable of the unjust steward our Lord had been derided by the covetous Pharisees, as the Preacher of fanciful and unheard-of novelties, He took occasion to say that the Law and the Prophets, as understood by the Jews, had lasted until St. John the Baptist; that since then the Kingdom of God had been preached; but that the inmost spirit of the Law was so absolutely a part of the teaching of the New Kingdom that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the Law to fail."[3]

In such sayings our Lord would have been understood to be using the accredited language of the synagogue about the Law: but what must have been the impression produced when He proceeded to apply this very language to His own teaching! "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but"—not the Law given amid the thunders of Sinai, but —"My words shall not pass away."

[1] St. Matt. v. 17. [2] *Ib.* v. 18. [3] St. Luke xvi. 17.

Other teachers have desired an immortality for their words or works, but true genius has known too well the fate that with the advance of time overtakes all merely human workmanship, to predict it. Shakespeare never supposed that he would be what he is to-day to the English and German peoples. But our Lord,—as it seemed, a Galilean peasant,—does not merely aspire: He foretells; He foretells for His words an imperishable life; He makes a claim which is surely the height of madness if it be not simple and sober truth.

"My words shall not pass away." Let us try to observe any characteristics of our Lord's reported language which may enable us to understand this confident prediction.

I.

That which strikes us first of all in the words of Jesus Christ is the authority which speaks in them, or rather which animates them.

An Evangelist says that our Lord's public teaching was so acceptable "because He taught as one having authority, and not as the Scribes."[1] The Scribes were anxious to bring their countrymen to look at the Law in the light of the traditional interpretations of which they were the guardians and exponents. But if the Scribes were to do this, it was not enough for them to say, "This is right; that is wrong." They found themselves confronted with the difficulties which present themselves to any merely human teacher, intrusted with the task of recommending to the human mind a doctrine which he believes to be true. He knows how solid and many-sided is the silent resistance which awaits him; he feels his way gently; he explores tentatively the field of discussion; he begins by trying to stimulate interest and

[1] St. Matt. vii. 29.

inquiry, and then, putting it on the right track, he essays to gain over the various faculties of his audience; he appeals to their understanding, to their sense of the fitness of things, to their sense of beauty or of truth, to their common sense, as the case may require. He marshals his reasons; he expands them; he sets them one by one before the mind which he desires to win; he lays siege to it as if it were a fortress which he is bent on capturing, and as if he were directing an intellectual battery against its defences and outworks. When argument fails, he appeals perhaps to sentiment, to feeling, to passion; he may prevail as a poet if he cannot prevail as a reasoner; but he cannot rest until he has done what he may to compel assent to the doctrine which he believes to be true.

This is what the Scribes did in their way; they were masters of a kind of reasoning which, however little suited to Western and modern tastes, was in its way subtle and effective. It was the instrument with which they worked; and they only succeeded at all if they could get people to attend to it. This, too, is what Socrates did, after a different fashion. He went about Athens asking people questions designed to make them uncomfortable, with a view to getting them to inquire, or to set them thinking. It was all very well as far as it went; but, at his best, Socrates was the apostle of some sublime uncertainties; he raised questions which he did not venture to answer: he made it his business not to administer intellectual truth, but to get people to question intellectual error.

With our Lord it was otherwise. He, generally speaking, takes no account whatever of those means of producing conviction which, in merely human speakers, command success. He is careful indeed to teach as men are able to bear; but, if they are able, He is indifferent to the inward opposition which His words arouse. He ignores or He

defies it; He makes no concessions to passion; He awes rather than satisfies the reason. He does not reason, at least as a rule; He affirms the truth, leaving it to make its own way in the soul. He teaches Nicodemus that a man must be born again if he is to see the kingdom of God; and Nicodemus asks how such a thing as a new birth is abstractedly possible. Instead of answering this question directly our Lord re-affirms more strongly—only with an added reference to the instrument of the new birth, Baptism—what He had taught before: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."[1] When the Jews in the synagogue at Capernaum took exception to His saying, "The bread which I will give is My Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world," and asked, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" our Lord only repeated more emphatically what He had said before: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life."[2] The self-justifying phrase of the old Hebrew prophets was "Thus saith the Lord": the prophets distinguished carefully between themselves and the real Author of the message which they bore to man; they effaced themselves, it has been well said, by their appeal to the Authority Whose organs they were. On our Lord's lips the common expression (it occurs more than seventy times) is, "Verily, verily, I say unto you"; so, too, "Believe in Me"; "Come unto Me"; "Keep My commandments"; "Follow Me"; "I am the Way"; "I am the Truth"; "I am the Life." He feels that He has an ancient right to a welcome within the soul of man: that He possesses the key to its wants and to its mysteries; that within it, as no other teacher can be, He will be at home, and will be owned as

[1] St. John iii. 3-5. [2] *Ib.* vi. 51-54.

its rightful Lord. Certainly He is careful to state that His doctrine is not His in such a sense as to be opposed to that of the Father; that He receives it from the Father; that He speaks as the Father prescribes; but this and similar language proves not that He is the merely human organ of a Divine Authority distinct from Himself: it illustrates His own words, "I and My Father are one thing."[1] In a human teacher, the phrases, "my doctrine," "my word," would be an impertinence; they are justified in our Lord's case by His sayings about His Divine Person; they belong to that commanding authority with which He approaches the soul of man. If His teaching is mysterious; if it enforces truths which stretch away into infinity, and which we have no means whatever of verifying, He tells us that He has seen what He teaches from everlasting, as He sees it now. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen."[2]

This is a first reason for the permanence of the words of Christ. They meet a great want in human nature. When a man is strong and in good spirits he likes to toy with speculations; but when he is sick, and suffering, and has another state of existence looming, however indistinctly, before him, he desires truth;—a truth, too, which dares to assert itself as truth, which knows its responsibilities, its frontiers, its premises and its consequences, its foes and its supporters. To talk at the bedside of a dying man as if you were doubtful about everything, but above all afraid of offending the literary susceptibilities of some very cultivated sceptics, would be clearly impossible. A religion may have—it has—a literary side; but, speaking broadly, literature is one thing, and religion is another and an infinitely higher and more sacred thing than literature. It was because our Lord's words go straight

[1] St. John x. 30. [2] *Ib.* iii. 11.

to the heart and soul of man that He shows Himself to be the Master of the absolute religion; and that He gives us a warrant that what He says will not pass away.

II.

A second characteristic of our Lord's words is their elevation.

They rise high above the prejudices and passions of the people, on whose good-will a human teacher in His position would have felt himself to be entirely dependent. Contrast Him with the great names in ancient philosophy, who kept their best thoughts about truth for a few choice spirits, for a select coterie of friends, but who flattered, while they despised, the superstitions of the multitude from lack of courage to tell it what they believed to be the truth. Not so did Jesus. The chosen motto of His work was, "The poor have the gospel preached to them."[1] As if to atone for the centuries of a world-wide neglect, He sought the soul of man in quarters where its very existence had been studiously ignored: He shed the light of the truths which He had brought from heaven on multitudes to whom all access to the highest human wisdom of the day was denied: He went up and down the villages and lanes of Galilee, scattering the Divine Seed by the way-side, and upon stony ground, and among the thorns, but content to know that, however it was received, justice was done to the long-neglected claims of the poor. "To the poor the gospel was preached,"—yes! but the poor did not dictate to the Divine Teacher what the gospel was to be. It was addressed not to their wishes, but to their wants; it set aside their most cherished prejudices; it proposed to make them happy in spite of themselves, and by means which were very unlike any that they imagined.

[1] St. Matt. xi. 5.

In His place a merely human teacher would almost certainly have become the object and the victim of an unbounded popularity: he would have sunk the Messianic hope to the level of a political aspiration for national enfranchisement; he would have given the teaching the merely earthly colouring which would have recommended it to the spirit of the time. But Jesus loved the people too well to flatter their illusions; His doctrine rose high above the atmosphere in which those illusions grew. He bade them follow Him, not to earthly conquest and prosperity, but first to the Cross, and then to Heaven; and it took many a year ere the people discovered that He was their best and truest Friend. His teaching rose high above the prejudices of the people, but it was not less raised above the current opinions of the well-informed and (so termed) religious classes among the Jews.

Read the Sermon on the Mount in order to see the force and extent of this difference. There we have a series of contrasts between the letter of the old Law, or the later precepts of the popular Jewish religion, and the new and Divine ideal of conduct which our Lord was placing before the conscience of man.[1] "It hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill." Jesus does not repeal, He enormously extends the range of this commandment: "I say unto you, Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment"; whosoever shall insult or exasperate him shall be condemned. Again: "It was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery." Our Lord explains the precept to forbid not merely acts but desires: He carries it into that region of motive and inclination of which a mechanical morality knows nothing. "I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust

[1] For the thought and many of the illustrations of this section of the sermon see Monsabré, *Carême* 1880; *Vie de Jésus-Christ*, p. 129 *seq.*

after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Again: "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement." Jesus disallows divorce altogether: "I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife," save for a reason which would have made the marriage contract void from the beginning, "causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." Again: "It hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not perjure thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths." But Jesus says, "I say unto you, Swear not at all," by anything either in heaven or earth, but let your words be simple, transparent, sincere. The old rule was, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"; but "I say unto you, Resist not evil";—if a man strikes you on one cheek, offer him the other; if he takes one unfair advantage, let him, if he will, take another: it is better to suffer than to inflict injury; better to yield than to retaliate. The old saying ran: "Love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." But it has had its day, that saying: "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father Who is in heaven." Here we see our Lord's relation to the current views of conduct among the well-informed and religious classes among His countrymen.

But His teaching rises no less above the ripest and largest wisdom of the ancient world,—the best and truest sayings which the human conscience, without the light of Revelation, has left for the guidance of human life.

There is the noble saying, "I am a man; I deem nothing that is human strange." Our Lord requires something more than this negative welcome. He bids man love his brother man, even to the extent, if need be, of dying for

him. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye should love one another, as I have loved you."[1]

There is the warning, so full of wisdom and of tenderness, "Maxima debetur pueris reverentia." Children should be treated with the respect which is due to their innocence of the world. But our Lord puts this on a higher ground; each child, He says, has an angel associate who gazes incessantly on the Face of God; woe to the man who leads one of them astray; "Take heed that ye scandalise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do alway behold the Face of My Father Who is in heaven."[2]

Again, there is the saying that a man in adversity is an object of reverence. This was a great advance upon the barbarous idea that adversity always implied some preceding wickedness, and that it warranted others in insulting or despising the unfortunate. But our Lord does not merely require us not to despise the unhappy. He makes misfortune an object of His choicest benedictions; He blesses the poor and the persecuted; He invites those who would follow Him most closely to associate themselves with the suffering; He makes Himself the recipient of all the kindness, all the honour, all the substantial assistance which is given to those who suffer. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."[3]

The ancient world said that to prefer life to honour is the worst of crimes. Our Lord raises us above that narrow idea of "honour" which was all that was meant in such sayings. He thinks less of the public acts which common opinion condemns, and which forfeit the respect or the goodwill of our fellow-men, than of the private acts or unrealised thoughts which cause shame and confusion of face before God; He warns us that the law of honour is

[1] St. John xiii. 34. [2] St. Matt. xviii. 10. [3] *Ib.* xxv. 40.

not always a safe guide; that often that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God; that thoughts or desires, whose existence is unsuspected by the world, may soil or fatally defile the soul; that those of whom all men speak well are really objects of compassion; and that it were better to forfeit the whole world than to lose the soul.

As we listen to Him we are conscious always and everywhere of matchless elevation. He is far above His countrymen,—far above the wisest wisdom of His time,—far above the wisest wisdom of all succeeding ages of which He has not been directly or indirectly the Author. As we listen to Him we feel that He lives and speaks in an atmosphere to which we only ascend at rare intervals, and by considerable efforts. As a Teacher, no less than as our Redeemer and our Lord, He invites the praises of the Church: "Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father." And, since He is thus above the level of human thought, His words will live. Time effaces that which belongs only and fundamentally to the mind of man; but here is a teaching which bears on it the imprint of a higher origin and a more commanding standpoint; the centuries may pass, but it will not pass away.

III.

A third characteristic of the words of Christ is, if I may rightly use the word in such a connection, their awful depth.

As we have seen, many of them were addressed to the people, and they were correspondingly simple in form; they were without any of the apparatus of learning, or the pretence of culture; they attracted by their studied simplicity: "the common people heard Him gladly."

They were of such a character that at first sight each hearer felt that he could make them his own, as if they were the sayings of a human parent or a human friend; each hearer felt at first as if he fully understood them, and saw all their bearings, and had sounded their meaning, and had only to lay up in his mind and heart what was at once so simple and so engaging.

This was a first and a very natural impression about the words of Jesus Christ. But when they were laid up in memory or taken down in writing, it was soon seen that there was a great deal more in them than had seemed to be the case at first. It was seen that beyond and beneath the first or superficial meaning there was a second, at once deeper and more adequate; perhaps that there was a third beyond. It was seen that they might be worked, like a mine, throughout a lifetime of study and prayer, throughout centuries of contemplation and discussion, and yet leave a believing soul, or a believing Church, with the conviction that they were as far as ever from being exhausted. It was seen that their seeming simplicity was but the measure of their real and marvellous depth.

Take, for instance, that gracious saying about Himself, "The Son of Man shall give His life a ransom for many."[1] It seemed to the first disciples that He was speaking of unselfishness carried to the point of dying, under what circumstances they could not as yet divine, for other men. But we read these pregnant words in the light of St. Paul's Epistles. We learn that they teach the great truth of the Atonement, the doctrine of a "propitiation through faith in His Blood,"[2] of His being "made sin for us Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,"[3] of "our being reconciled to God by the death of His Son,"[4] and of our being bought with a price,

[1] St. Matt. xx. 28. [2] Rom. iii. 25. [3] 2 Cor. v. 21. [4] Rom. v. 10.

the blood of a Lamb without blemish and immaculate,[1] from the realm of sin and death.

Again, our Lord, speaking in the synagogue of Capernaum, said, "My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed." The Jews could only ask in their purblind way, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" But if the disciples were sure that He could do what He said, their sense of His meaning was also, as we know, sufficiently indefinite. Only when, long afterwards, He was near the end of His earthly life, when in those moments of transcendent joy which preceded the great Agony, He took bread and wine, and blessed it, and gave it, and said, "This is My Body, this is My Blood"; only then did they understand how His Divine Humanity was to restore and support our fallen nature, and to unite it, throughout the ages of Christendom, to our Father and our God.

Again, what an entire theology lies in those words uttered to the sorrowing sister of Lazarus: "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."[2] On the ears of millions of believing mourners these blessed words have fallen, and each, as he has listened, has seemed to gain a new sense of the power of the Risen Christ; to catch some previously unrecognised rays of that light which alone brightens the darkness of the tomb.

Again, there is that solemn warning, "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."[3] A child does not understand this; to understand it is needed the experience of a life. But who can have lived a few years and not have seen again and again how it is verified! Surely we cannot to-day forget that since last Sunday two prebendaries of this cathedral church have been

[1] 1 St. Pet. i. 18, 19.
[2] St. John xi. 25, 26.
[3] St. Matt. xxiv. 44.

called to their account; one sinking into the grave in the fulness of years and of labours; the other called away in a moment beneath the waters of the northern lake—called away from his ripe and as yet unshattered strength, from his life of work, from his large family, from his earthly anticipations and interests, into the presence of Christ.[1]

Our Lord's words have depths in them which are explored sometimes by theology, sometimes by the experiences of life, but which elude complete investigation. They have about them that character of infinitude which belongs to the more than human mind from which they proceed. Their depth is seen, moreover, in their extraordinary and enduring ascendancy over the best of men, at the distance of so many centuries. He said to His apostles, "Go, teach all nations," and they went. He still has the power of pouring His own enthusiasm for the highest good of mankind into the souls of others by these imperishable words. They still move the soul of man in its inmost recesses; multitudes are living throughout Christendom, the whole direction and manner of whose lives has been changed by their searching and resistless power. Nothing like this is true of merely human speech or writing; we quote the great chiefs of thought, the great students of human nature; they illustrate our meaning, when we want an authority; but they do not control us in spite of ourselves; they do not revolutionise our lives. One only can do this: He Who saw into the depths of the nature which He had created before He made it His own, and Who "spake as never man spake" accordingly.

"My words shall not pass away." There are loud voices and accomplished writers who say that they shall; that it is only a question of time, and that the

[1] The Rev. Edward Auriol, Rector of St. Dunstan's in the West, died August 10, 1880; and the Rev. Henry Wright, Incumbent of St. John's Chapel, Hampstead, was drowned in Coniston Lake, August 13, 1880.

words of Christ are destined to meet the fate of all merely human words:—to contribute an element of whatever value to the sum-total of human thought, and then to die away and be forgotten. But these speakers and writers do not answer an important and inevitable inquiry, viz., What is to take their place? For, human nature being what it is, Christ's words answer to demands, they fill a void which most assuredly cannot be neglected or ignored. Whence come we? What are we? What are our relations to the Unseen and the Eternal? What is the true rule of our lives here? Whither are we going? What is to follow the last earthly scene of death? Jesus our Lord has answered all these questions, and they are the most interesting questions—incomparably the most interesting—that can engage the attention of a thoughtful man. He tells us that we come from God; that we are immortal souls; that through Himself we may have ready access to the Eternal Father; that His precepts are the one true and perfect rule by which we ought to live; that after death comes the resurrection and the judgment, and hell and heaven. But we turn to the masters of the new materialism, and ask them how they answer the great questions which surround us, and to each and all they have but one answer: We cannot tell. Whence we come, why we are here, whither we are tending, how we ought to live, whether there is any Unseen Being with Whom we can have relations, and what relations are possible—of each and all they are professedly ignorant; nay, they would fain persuade us, if they could, that these questions, our interest in which is the very certificate of our possessing a higher than a merely animal existence, should never be asked! Is it possible that such systems should take the place of the words of Christ in the hearts and minds of men? No, it is impossible. For a moment their exponents may dazzle a generation—or some part of

it—by the brilliancy and audacity of their speculations; but in the long-run the higher claims of the human soul will make themselves heard above the din and clatter of a thousand laboratories, and the words which have thrilled a willing Christendom with awe and love for two thousand years will reassert their empire.

"My words shall not pass away." Write down these words, dear brethren, on the title-page of your New Testaments, that when you open that blessed book they may remind you of what you are doing: you are approaching the One Teacher Whose authority is not impaired by time. Write them down, fathers and mothers, but especially you who are Christian mothers, that you may never forget to teach your children, more carefully and thoroughly than anything that merely commands success in earthly life, those words which are more precious than ever before in the hour of death, and which are triumphantly justified beyond the veil. Write them down, I pray you, in your books and in your hearts, gentle and simple, lettered and unlearned, old and young, that they may help you, while the day of trial lasts, to set your feet upon the Rock, and order your goings. Never in the morning leave your room without asking, What do these blessed words, what does some one of them, say to me for guidance, or support, or instruction, or warning in the work of the day? Never lie down at night without bringing what has been thought and said and done to be judged by the words of the Divine Teacher, that you may ask His pardon where you have gone astray, or thank Him for His grace when you have been enabled to conquer. To make those words the rule of life and thought must needs be the effort of a true Christian. God grant that we may make it while yet we can, and may find at our last hour, from a personal experience, that the words which do not pass away are also the words of Eternal Life.

SERMON II.

THE TRUE REWARD.

St. Matt. vi. 2.

Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

OUR Lord repeats these words three times in His Sermon on the Mount, and we may therefore conclude that He means us to pay particular attention to them.

He is contrasting the outward obedience which was paid by the Pharisees to the rules of their own Jewish law with that inward and sincere service which He expected from His own disciples. In doing this He passes in review three duties: almsgiving, prayer, fasting. Tobit's advice to his son was a maxim of Jewish piety: "Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness."[1] The language of Cornelius to St. Peter shows what was the practice of a pious convert from heathenism to the religion of Israel in the days of the Apostles: "Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God."[2] Alms, prayer, fasting: these were three main duties in the life of a pious Jew, and in this order of importance. Alms, prayer, fasting: these were to be, to the end of time, duties for all pious Christians, but not quite in this order of importance, nor yet dictated to

[1] Tob. xii. 8. [2] Acts x. 30, 31.

the Christian conscience by the same class of motives as to that of the Jew.

Our Lord's discussion of these duties—almsgiving, prayer, fasting—follows a regular plan. First He describes the corrupt Jewish practice in the case of each duty, then He observes what was secured by it. Then He lays down what He expects from His own servants; and lastly assures them of the reward which will follow obedience.

1. He begins with almsgiving.

"When," He says, "thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men." He adds: "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."

This was the way of many Pharisees, or, as our Lord calls them, the actors or hypocrites. In contrast with it, our Lord lays down the rule for Christians:

"But thou when thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father, Which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly."

2. Next, as to prayer.

"The hypocrites," He says, "love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." He adds again: "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."

This was the way of the ostentatious Pharisees. Christian prayer was to be offered on a different principle:

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father Which is in secret; and thy Father, Which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

3. Lastly, He notices fasting.

"When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may

appear unto men to fast." He adds a third time: "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."

Such was the Jewish fasting of the day. Our Lord's disciples were to fast also, but from a very different motive:

"But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father Which is in secret: and thy Father, Which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

In these three strophes (for our Lord was really speaking in poetry) there is a double contrast: a contrast between the performances, and a contrast of the rewards. The work which is meant for the eye and approbation of men is placed side by side with the work which is offered simply to God—as the true Lord and Master of human wills, Whose approval is of the first, or rather of solitary importance. The alms given to attract attention to the giver are contrasted with the alms given in secret. The prayers offered in the synagogues and at the corners of the streets are contrasted with the prayers said in the secrecy of the closet. The fasting proclaimed to all the world by the disfigured countenance is contrasted with the fasting disguised from the world's eye by the anointed head and washed face and cheerful countenance. And after the contrast of the performances follows the contrast of the rewards. Each class of workman has his reward, and it is in keeping with the aim of his effort. Those who give alms, and pray, and fast, in order to win human approval, do succeed in securing what they want. "They have their reward." And those who give alms, and pray, and fast, in order to carry out the will of God, so far as they know it, these also succeed in securing what they want: "The Father, Which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward them openly."

"They have their reward!" As these words fall once,

and a second, and a third time from the Divine lips of Christ, we seem to hear in them a threefold lesson. They proclaim a truth. They suggest a contrast. They pronounce a sentence.

I.

"They have their reward!" Here we have, first of all, a profound truth about human nature. Man, as man, works for an object, or, as our Lord says, for a reward. The lower creatures work without any object or end in view; they have no horizon beyond the mechanical action in which they are engaged. They eat, walk, toil, without any accompanying reflection; they meet as best they can the necessity, or they address themselves to the enjoyment of the moment; but they do not connect it with what has preceded and what will follow it; still less do they give it a place in a protracted effort which is to result in something beyond itself. With man—gentle or simple, barbarous or civilised, Christian or Pagan—it is otherwise. Man's reason impresses on him the necessity of seeking in or beyond his action an end of some kind to be secured by it. If man makes an expenditure of time and strength, this is with a view to some result which reason demands even if imagination describes it. Be the action itself trivial or important, the exercise of muscle or the exercise of mind—be its scene the humblest of peasant homes or the proudest of imperial palaces—it is, as human action, directed towards an object. That object may be near or remote, it may be within reach or unattainable, it may be precious or utterly worthless, it may be earthly and degrading or supersensuous and Divine. But, be this as it may, the law of rational human action holds good. It is never objectless, since to be objectless is to cease to be human. And our Lord, Who had created human nature

before by His incarnation He made it His own that He might restore it, pointed to this rule of human action when He said of one class of His creatures, "They have their reward."

But an objection may be raised which we may pause for a moment to consider. Do you mean to say, it will be asked, that there is no such thing as disinterested action? Does man never do what is generous or right without any aim beyond? Are the preachers of the Divine Self-sacrifice to echo that shallow maxim of worldly cynicism, which tells us that "every man has his price"?

Here, my brethren, there is a confusion of thought, between pursuing a noble and disinterested object and pursuing no object at all. At bottom the objector would seem to think that the only objects worth the name are selfish or earthly objects. Yet the smile of God upon the recesses of conscience is not less an object than the public approval of our fellow-men; the moral joy of doing what is right is just as much an end of action as the material gain of doing what is wrong. "Every man has his price!" Doubtless the cynic who shaped that saying meant what is a libel on our human nature. He meant to say that in every man, even in those who seem to be noblest in action and in purpose, most consistent and persevering in their elevation above the average selfishness of their fellow-men, there is a hidden passion, a secret weakness, an undetected flaw,—if you could only get at it,—which, once reached, would place them on a level with the rest of the race. They owe, so he thinks, their apparent elevation to the accident of not having been as yet approached on the vulnerable side. He agrees with what Satan said of Job: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the

land: but put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face."[1] No, brethren, this is not wisdom; it is mere vulgar suspiciousness. In all generations there are some men of whom it is not true that they have their price, if by price be meant something that will appeal to the lower instincts, whether they be mental or bodily, of our fallen nature. But in another and a higher sense, we may readily admit the proverb is true enough. Those who have risen above human care and crime, the truest saints and servants of Christ, these too, in one sense, have their price. It cannot indeed be rendered to them by any earthly paymaster, but it is a price nevertheless; it is the object for which they have lived, worked, and suffered,—the eternal approval of the Perfect Moral Being, Whose they are, and Whom they serve. They are no real exception to the rule that every man has an object, be it what it may,—that all human life and work is directed towards what our Lord calls a reward.

And in their way the Pharisees too of Christ's day obeyed this law; they had a definite object before them—the good opinion of their contemporaries,—and they secured it by their efforts. "They have their reward."

II.

"They have their reward!" Here is suggested, tacitly but forcibly, a tragic contrast. Their reward! There is then another reward than theirs: another, and a higher. Let us turn our eyes towards it—this true reward of men,—this prize of prizes, for which any other must be a paltry substitute.

"The Lord hath made all things for Himself."[2] That is the secret, the key of creation. If God was to create at

[1] Job i. 9-11. [2] Prov. xvi. 4.

all, let us say it with reverence, He could not do otherwise. The Self-existent and All-perfect Being could not surround Himself with creatures who were to find the final satisfaction of their various powers and instincts in something else than Himself. He is the End of all beings, He is the Centre of all existences, by an inevitable necessity,—because He is God. The irrational creation subserves His purpose by an irresistible law. The sun, the animals, the plants, cannot but praise the Lord, as they obey the laws which govern them; they are fated, by a happy necessity, to promote His glory. With man it is otherwise. Man has the majestic, it may be the fatal, prerogative of deciding whether he will serve his Creator or not. The sovereign gift of free-will, which is man's highest distinction among the creatures, involves this power of deciding whether to live for God, or for some one or some thing else. But however man may decide, the law of his happiness, as of his perfection, remains the same. Only one Being can say to the soul of man, as He said to the patriarch nearly four thousand years ago, "I will be thy exceeding great Reward."[1] There is that in man which nothing short of God can satisfy. There are inexplicable longings, depths of restlessness, unexplored chasms of possible despair, out of which the soul of man cries for an Infinite and Perfect Being as its true End and Object in existence. "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice."[2] And He does satisfy, or, as our Lord says, reward the soul that gives itself to Him. All the mysterious yearnings of the heart, all the bright utopian visions of boyhood, all the earnest dreamings of the higher and purer hours of later life, find their counterpart and their explanation in Him, the Infinite and the Eternal. "I will be thy exceeding great Reward." So it was in the beginning of human history; so it is now

[1] Gen. xv. 1. [2] Ps. cxxx. 1.

and ever shall be. Those only are kept in perfect peace whose minds are stayed on Him. The passion for truth, the passion for beauty, the demand for law, the sense of awe, of wonder, of reverence, of exhilaration,—all are satisfied in the Eternal God. They are satisfied, in no stinted way, here and now in this sphere of sense and time; but they are only satisfied perfectly in the endless Beatific Vision of the saints in heaven.

This, my brethren, was the reward of which our Lord spoke. "Thy Father, Which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly." Heaven means at bottom not an infinitely magnificent pleasure-garden, but lasting contact between a created nature and its God. Pleasure was said by a great heathen thinker to consist in the contact between a faculty and its object; and man's true and perfect happiness consists in like manner in contact—contact the closest, the most uninterrupted—with the Being Who has shaped every faculty of man's existence that it might find its satisfaction only in Himself.

Men sometimes speak of certain abstract objects as the reward of their efforts in life. They live for virtue; they live for truth; they live for philosophy; they live for philanthropy. Brethren, if these things are real to them, they live for God. He is the Eternal Loving-kindness from which all human love of man must flow: He is the Eternal Wisdom, the Eternal Truth, the one unerring Philosophy of which all that can present itself to a created intelligence is a spark or a shadow; He is Himself the Absolute Virtue, Virtue in its personal and self-existing form, so that to live really for virtue is to live for Him. In Him all these nobler aspirations of men meet and are satisfied; they are all included in that comprehensive promise—"I will be thy exceeding great Reward."

III.

"They have their reward!" In these words we hear, thirdly, a judicial sentence, which the Divine Speaker passes on some of the men of His time. "They have their reward." The original means, "they have it altogether, so entirely that there is nothing to be looked for in the future." The meaning is that they have contracted for a certain stipend, and they have received it; they have received it, and they cannot still expect what they have already received; they have made the best of their bargain, such as it is, and there is an end of it. This is at once the language of irony and the language of compassion. Certainly it is irony. The Pharisees gave alms, they prayed, they fasted, for a certain consideration. They believed themselves to be men of practical sense, without any foolish enthusiasms or fancies. They wished to get the good opinion of their contemporaries; and they succeeded. It was not a high object indeed; but it was the height of their ambition. As they passed along the streets, men saluted them as the best men of the day, as serious, moderate, respectable, as the true representatives of all that was great and noble in ancient Israel. As they gave alms in the public places, and prayed visibly in the midst of crowds, and bore in their emaciated frames the proofs of long and painful fasting, men remarked that the spirit of Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Daniel and the Maccabees still lived among these worthy and devoted descendants of Abraham. It was this very recognition which they had all along in view; and our Lord, as if registering a fact of everyday experience, observed that they had obtained it. Nobody could say that their efforts had been wasted: they had worked

for popularity and credit, and it was ready to their hand.

"They have their reward!" If this is irony, it is much more: there is in it an undertone of deep pathos. It was pathetic that the foremost men in Israel should be thus giving their money for that which was not bread, and toiling for that which could not satisfy.[1] Were these men the children of psalmists and prophets, of saints and patriarchs, each and all of whom, in every variety of strain, had insisted upon the supreme claims of God so jealously and peremptorily as to exclude all human rivals? Was this the outcome of the religion of Sinai; of the Mosaic revelation of the unique Majesty of God; of the favours lavished on the chosen race, during a thousand years of triumph and disaster? Had these men been trained in the most spiritual school known to the ancient world, only to seek for a recompence which the higher minds among the heathen would have treated—nay, did treat—with deliberate neglect?

It was pathetic: for two reasons. This reward for which the Pharisees worked so hard was transient. It was the creature of a day; the men who enjoyed it most might easily outlive it. Popular consideration cannot be ensured; it may be courted successfully; but it is an inconstant visitant; it disappears as rapidly and as capriciously as it came. Nothing is more pathetic in English history than the closing years of Queen Elizabeth, conscious that she had outlived the acclamations of her people, and sinking gradually into her grave with the sense of having aimed at an object which was already dissolving before her eyes.

And, secondly, this reward, considered as a certificate of merit, was worthless, even when it seemed to be most enjoyable. What was the real dignity of the tribunal

[1] Isa. lv. 2.

which awarded it? What was the true value of the sanction which it pronounced? How could a mixed multitude, for whose judgment in any other matter the Pharisees themselves would have felt and professed scant respect, really give moral satisfaction by its approval of their actions? The matter would not bear reflection, but then, vanity does not reflect. It lives upon the surface of life; it makes the most of the trifles which feed its successive caprices; they are trifles,—they are worthless,—but it has its reward.

IV.

Let us endeavour to carry away one or two practical lessons.

1. Our Lord's words suggest the true idea of a Christian's life. A Christian life is a venture; it is a stake upon the eternal future. This is one of the deepest differences between it and the lives of men who are not governed by Christian principles. The ordinary man of the world says, "Everything after death is at best uncertain, and therefore I shall make what I can, in the way of enjoyment, out of the hours of this life, as they pass." He has his reward. The Christian says, "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."[1] His reward is to be the product of an investment in the future. He dreads nothing so much as the risk of drawing it before the time. He sees the true deep meaning of those solemn words of Jesus Christ: "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you";[2] and again, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My

[1] 2 Tim. i. 12. [2] St. Luke vi. 26.

name's sake."[1] It does not follow that because a man is abused in this life he will be glorified in the next. But, at any rate, there is a safety in being unpopular, unrecognised, thought little of, denounced, which those who have staked all upon the world after death gratefully recognise. And there is a danger about success, about the kind words of friends, about the smile and homage of society, about the patronage of the powerful and the great, about public recognition of good and generous deeds, which should haunt a soul that is really living for hereafter. Each man must ask himself the question, Is my reward being had now? Is anything left to be given by and by at the hands of Christ?

2. On the other hand, it does not necessarily follow that all good works done publicly forfeit Christ's approval hereafter. He Who said of the Jews, "They have their reward," said also to His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works."[2] Some Christians owe publicity in what they do to others: they have to act, not merely in view of God's glory, but so as to give a good example. This is true of all who are in a position of responsibility or influence; rulers, clergymen, parents, landowners, heads of families—these all are bound to works of mercy, to prayer, to self-denial, and to letting others see that they own the obligation. All will be well, if they can be fairly sure of their own intention —to give glory to God instead of to get glory from men. There is no harm in doing a kindness publicly, or in worshipping in a crowd, if the publicity is put up with instead of being sought, and if the real intent be to do service to the Father Which seeth in secret. Publicity is not fatal to our loyalty to the precept, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." God's glory may require that a man should "confess

[1] St. Matt. v. 11. [2] *Ib.* v. 16.

Christ before men" in whatever way; and the intention to glorify God will transfigure the act—just as a beautiful soul lights up a rude or ugly countenance.

3. What our Lord's words come to is this, that a good intention to serve God is the soul of a good act, whatever be its outward form. A work good in its outward form may be utterly vitiated by its inspiring motive. It may resemble a man with a beautiful face, yet possessed by a devil. It may be fair and glorious in the eyes of men, yet disowned, as having on it the trade-mark of the enemy,—disowned before God and His angels. The poison of an impure motive, the love of human praise, will make the kindest deeds, the heaviest sacrifices, the most painful efforts, worse than worthless. Too easy is it now, as eighteen centuries ago, to enjoy our reward here and now, and to have no part in, no expectation for the everlasting future.

On the other hand, a sincere desire to glorify God, although it cannot make an act, such as theft or murder, which is intrinsically bad, anything else than what it is, can and does make acts, otherwise trivial and insignificant, things of high value in the kingdom of heaven. A bit of paper is sufficiently worthless; but if signed by a man of credit it may be a cheque for ten thousand pounds. Hundreds of the actions of a Christian throughout the day would be utterly insignificant if the intention to glorify God, in union with the infinite merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, did not confer on them a lustre which is altogether independent of their intrinsic worth.

4. The most practical resolution to take is to endeavour to think of our work in life as we shall think of it when we are dying. Certain it is that at that solemn hour all that has been done to win the praise of man, all that has not been offered to God, will be accounted worthless. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have

we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me."[1] The outward splendours of a life of even apostolic devotion will then count for little, if there have not been a simple desire within to do what has been done for the glory of the Invisible Christ. The applause of mobs, or of literary circles, or of clubs, or of drawing-rooms, or of senates, will then be rated at their true value as the verdict of human judgments, controlled by human passions, and as unworthy of the aim of an immortal being. One Being only, in His Sanctity, His Justice, His Majesty, will then be present to the eye of the soul,—if it be in any sense alive to the solemnities of the moment. "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Think of that hour, so inevitable,—it may be, so near,—and resolve to live for a reward which will not then appear utterly worthless. Resolve to "set God always before you," in work as in devotion, in the business and the relaxations of life as well as in the hours of silence and reflection. It may be hard at first to think, speak, and work in the consciousness that the eye of an Unseen Master is upon you, and with the object of offering to Him what you think and say and do. It may be hard; but, depend upon it, it will be worth the effort. Nothing is really gained by that which passes almost before we have had time to grasp it: and nothing is lost by momentary sores and disappointments which are the prelude to a future of endless joy.

[1] St. Matt. vii. 22, 23.

SERMON III.

PROVIDENCE.

ST. MATT. vi. 30.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

IN the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord, as every one knows, gives an outline of the new kingdom of heaven which He purposed to set up upon earth, and of which He Himself was to be the Monarch. He first describes the character of its citizens in the Beatitudes. He then points out the nature of their influence among mankind at large: they were to preserve society from corruption, like the salt; they were to guide it like the city set on a hill, like the light on a candlestick. He proceeds to explain that the Law of the new kingdom would not destroy the Law of the old, but, on the contrary, would fulfil it—fulfil it in the spirit even when setting it aside in the letter; and then He shows how this principle would apply to six different precepts of the ancient Law, which He passes in review. After this He describes the new life of the citizens of the kingdom, as seen in the unostentatious practice of almsgiving, of prayer, and of fasting; but also as apprehended, even more intimately, in its ruling temper and spirit,—in its persistent laying up the true treasure in heaven, in its single-minded devotion to the service of God, in its comparative indifference to earthly interests such as those of food and dress.

It is at this point that we come upon that section of the

Sermon which is selected for to-day's[1] Gospel, and in one particular this section differs from all the remaining portions. Whereas they are moral,—concerned, that is to say, with questions only of man's duty and character,—this is doctrinal, it reveals a truth of the Divine Nature. This revelation is indeed made with a moral object. Our Lord is insisting upon the duty of leaving cares about food and dress trustfully and unreservedly in the loving hands of God. His followers, He hints, might just as well be Gentiles if they are to exhaust their energies upon such cares as these. But what is to be the justification of this tranquil self-abandonment, of this implicit confidence? It can only be justified upon the supposition that God is a Being having particular powers, and of a particular character. Confidence in God, for instance, would be entirely irrational, if He were conceived of as a Destiny, as a Fate, as a Force, or as a Soul of the Universe; if He were not believed to be a Person, distinct from the Universe, its Ruler and Sustainer as well as its Creator, acting upon it, in the perfection of His freedom, and without any limit to His power, except such as His own moral Nature may impose. Again, confidence in God would be misplaced if it were believed that He is the Personal, Free, and Omnipotent Creator, and yet were imagined to act, as we should say, capriciously, that is, without reference to those eternal laws of righteousness and truth, the traces and echoes of which we find within ourselves, and which are, in their essence and demonstrably, not fruits of His arbitrary enactment, but constitutive parts of His Nature. Our Lord, therefore, reveals God as a Father,—a revelation which assures us at once of His power and of His love. It is the combination of these two facts of the Divine Nature—God's almightiness and His love,—which, taken together, constitute or warrant what we term His Pro-

[1] The fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

vidence;—His power, that is, under the guidance of His love, making provision for the good of His creatures generally, but supremely and in particular of man, and, among men, in an eminent degree, of His servants.

In dealing with this subject our Lord twice over argues from the less to the greater. If God provides for the wild birds sufficient and appropriate food, is it to be imagined that He will allow creatures who can freely and intelligently choose His service to remain unfed? If God clothes the lilies of Palestine with a beauty which throws even the splendours of Solomon's court into the shade, is it to be supposed that He will allow His own children to lack clothing unless they make dress the first study of their lives? The argument is, that if He feels so much interest in lower forms of life, in the grass and in the bird, He must feel a much greater interest in the creature which He has placed at the summit of the visible creation —in man; that the Author and Source of life cares for created life with an intensity proportioned to the degree and dignity of its several manifestations, and that, therefore, this care reaches its culminating point, as far as the visible creation is concerned, in man. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." "Are ye not much better than they?" "Shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

This particular care of God for man, and, among men, for His servants and worshippers, is not indeed a doctrine peculiar to the New Testament. Our Lord states it with very vivid emphasis, and in connection with His revelation of the Fatherly character of God, as manifested to the first citizens of the new kingdom of heaven; but in truth it runs throughout the Old Testament. The lives of the patriarchs illustrate it as applied to God-serving families. The history of the Jewish people shows its application to the vicissitudes of national life and conduct. In

biographies such as those of Joseph, of David, of Daniel, we have eminent examples of its bearing on the case of individuals. Nowhere, perhaps, is it drawn out so fully, so forcibly, so pathetically as in the Psalter. Two very distinct classes of Psalms are entirely devoted to unfolding the providential action of God. Read the long historical Psalms, such as the 78th, the 89th, the 105th, the 106th, composed as they were almost without an exception some centuries after the days of David, when evil times had fallen upon the holy race, and good men had leisure in exile or in retirement to reflect upon and draw out the stern and soothing lessons of the past. These Psalms are one long commentary upon God's providential action towards Israel, in its various aspects of mercy, of judgment, of faithfulness to past promises, of opening opportunities for the future. And the shorter vivid personal Psalms, written, so many of them, at times or amid scenes of personal danger, and in the majority of cases, we may be quite sure, by David himself—these, too, are so many praises of or hymns to the Divine Providence, reminders of past assistance, pleadings for present help, acts of passionate affection, acts of unreserved resignation, above all, acts of entire confidence. Who has not felt the beauty, if not the undying power, of such Psalms as the 71st?—"In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust; let me never be put to confusion, but rid me and deliver me in Thy righteousness; incline Thine ear unto me, and save me. Be Thou my strong rock, whereunto I may always resort. Thou hast promised to help me, for Thou art my house of defence and my castle." Or of the 91st?—"Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say unto God, Thou art my hope and my stronghold: my God, in Him will I trust. For He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome

pestilence. He shall defend thee under His wings, and thou shalt be safe under His feathers: His faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

Against this general truth, that mankind generally, and God's servants in particular, are the objects of His especial care, there are objections in current habits of thought which it is here necessary to notice.

I.

It is argued, first of all, that such a conception of the world and of life is unscientific. "This picture," it is said, "of a Heavenly Father supplying food and finding clothing for His children belongs to the infancy of human thought. Instead of it, we have now a very different idea of the real nature of the influences around and above us. We now know that we live under a vast and complex system of invariable laws; of laws which govern the highest and the lowest forms of life, the sphere of matter and the sphere of mind. Of these laws some are perfectly understood, so that their operations can be calculated with an unfailing certainty; others are only coming year by year into our intellectual view; others are but guessed at; vast numbers are still unsuspected. But the reign of law is an established certainty; and in recognising the reign of law, the mind of man has reached a conclusion which is fatal to the idea of a particular providence exerted by God in favour of individual human beings."

This is what is said. But, in the first place, let me ask, Why is the idea of law inconsistent with that of a Father's government and care? We Christians, who believe that order is a primary element of beauty, and that its very seat and source is in the Divine Life Itself, can have no difficulty in recognising order in the Divine government, or in seeing God's hand in a rule of universal

law. Nay, more, we should expect order rather than innovation, for this very obvious reason: if the Eternal Worker works always for the best, His action would, under similar circumstances, naturally repeat itself, and it would not be less His action because it does repeat itself. His Hand is not less distinctly visible to His children when the sun day by day rises and sets in its appointed course than when it stands still upon Gibeon. He will not be in our eyes more certainly the Ruler of the spheres when at His bidding the stars shall fall from heaven[1] than He is now, when "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handy-work," and "one day telleth another, and one night interpreteth another."[2] Great catastrophes may, and do, from time to time recall man's earth-bound soul to the sense of the presence of the Eternal Being before Whom we dwell; but in the ordinary processes of growth and decay, of disease and death, He "worketh hitherto";[3] nay, with us as with Elijah, it may be that the still small voice manifests His presence, amid the repose of order, rather than in the earthquake and the fire.

Of course the real question is behind: What do men mean by law? When serious believers in a Living God talk of the laws of the Universe, they mean by the expression those uniform modes of working which they have observed on the part of the Maker and Ruler of all —the only, the living, the perfectly free Worker, Whose Hand is everywhere present. But the word is sometimes used to denote a self-existing force, the origin of which none can tell, and the empire of which no governing will can suspend or check. This idea of law is really inconsistent with any belief in God at all. If God is tied down by physical laws so completely that we cannot dare to count upon His power, His freedom, His love, except

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 29. [2] Ps. xix. 1, 2. [3] St. John v. 17.

as these are already identified with some natural law that binds Him, then these laws are our real divinity, and we are really face to face with a Nature-power, with a heartless Fate which may pamper us one moment and crush us the next. If God, although acting in order, is really free in His action, so free that He can, if He wills, for sufficient reasons, innovate upon it, then in the fact that law is the general principle of His government, there is nothing inconsistent with His fatherly Providence. He does not clothe the lilies of the field one whit the less because the mysterious laws of growth are everywhere the same; and it is not necessary that He should vindicate the reality of His care for us individually by dealing with each one of us upon principles which He applies nowhere else.

II.

But, it is asked, secondly, "Is not belief in God's protecting Providence dishonourable to God Himself? Are we to believe that so great, so infinite a Being, the Maker and Master of all these worlds and systems of worlds, stretching away as they do into illimitable space, concerns Himself with the trivial wants and interests of a worm that crawls on the surface of one of His smallest planets? Is it not man's conceit which has thus brought down to earth the Lord of heaven, and which represents the Ruler of the spheres as intent upon providing us with clothing and dress? Science has enlarged our conceptions of God; and while such prayers for specific blessings, as those of the Psalter and the Litany, were intelligible when men thought that the earth was the centre of the universe, they are lamentably out of place when men have learnt the truth from Copernicus and Newton."

You talk, my brethren, of the greatness of God. It

would be very difficult to prove that science has really presented us with a higher idea of God than that which Revelation gives us: it has merely enhanced our ideas—and it has wonderfully enhanced them—of one, but not the most important department of His activity. And certainly, as we say in the *Venite exultemus* every morning, "The Lord is a great God: and a great King above all gods. In His hand are all the secret places of the earth: and the strength of the hills is His also." But is it a true idea of greatness which insists that because He rules the earth and the heavens, He cannot be expected to give attention to the details of His government? Surely, in that case, the Divine Mind falls short of our conception of the highest forms of created intellect! The highest human intellects are not those which are entirely absorbed in the contemplation and mastery of great principles, still less those which are absorbed in cataloguing details; the really great mind combines the two powers and processes, and is great in the degree in which it can effect the combination. The really great philosopher is not lost in transcendental abstractions, but is perpetually checking his too luxuriant imagination by the severe application to observation and fact. The really great ruler of men is not only a student of the generalities of good government; he is perpetually working at statistics,—interesting himself, as far as he possibly can, in all the details of the personal wants of the people he rules.

To call this false notion of God's greatness anthropomorphic is to do it too much honour; for, of a truth, it does not take the highest type of the human mind, but only a very one-sided and imperfect type, as its standard and starting-point for the measurement of God. To say that God is too great to attend to the wants of individual men looks, at first sight, like reverence; but it is reverence

of that insincere and spurious kind which goes through the proprieties of etiquette in the palace of a falling dynasty, while its heart is with the revolution outside that is already battering at the gates and clamouring for an abdication. This reverence, forsooth, would fain bow God out of His own world with punctilious ceremony, or it would only retain Him under conditions such as were those which were imposed on the later Mogul sovereigns at Delhi, surrounded as they were with ceremonial obsequiousness, and reduced withal to a practical impotence. God, my brethren, to be God at all, is infinite. No magnitudes are beyond His grasp, since He includes them all; but also no details are so minute as to escape His perfect appreciation of them. If we can conceive of no limits to space, we can also conceive no real limits to the divisibility of an atom; and in either direction we are on a track of thought which opens a real view of the Nature of the One Infinite Self-existent Being, Whose real greatness would be as surely forfeited if He did not count the hairs of our heads, as if He did not guide the movements of the suns. And, therefore, discarding this epicurean idea of Deity, which would enhance His Majesty at the expense of His Providence, the Church of Christ sings on: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, That hath His dwelling so high, and yet humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth?"[1]

Again, you lay stress upon the insignificance of man. But at least man, whatever his material insignificance, can do that which no other creature in the visible creation can do: he can conceive of God. He can understand, as no other creature understands, that there is a Being above him, Infinite, Eternal, without bounds either to His Knowledge or His Might, to Whom all else owe the

[1] Ps. cxiii. 5.

original and the continued gift of their existence, and before Whom all else, the highest, the mightiest, the purest, are as nothing. Man cannot merely think of this Being; he can learn to feel towards Him a sincere, a passionate affection; he can live for Him, consciously, intensely, perseveringly. Yes! he can turn his thought, too, in upon himself, and dwell upon and take the measure of his own existence, of his own place and destiny in the universe of creatures. And why? Because man is not merely an animal organism, but an immortal soul: because, living as he does upon the frontier of two worlds, the animal and the spiritual, he belongs in his deepest being, in his personality, to the world of spirits, and as a spirit, he is in his Creator's eyes utterly distinct from and higher than any mere material existence. People speak of man's insignificance in terms which might lead us to suppose that the true measure of greatness in the mind of the great Creator was material bulk; and that huge animals or granite mountains have in His eyes claims to respect which a spiritual essence does not possess. Believe it, "He hath no pleasure in the strength of an horse, neither delighteth He in any man's legs. But the Lord's delight is in them that fear Him, and put their trust in His mercy." Himself in His eternal Essence a Moral and Spiritual Being, He feels in the moral world an interest which belongs to its intrinsic magnificence, to its relative nearness to Himself: and the evening prayer of a Christian child, adoring His majesty, and asking for His pardon, has, beyond all doubt, in His eyes a price and a significance which the vastest phenomena of inanimate nature altogether lack.

III.

But it is asked, thirdly, whether such a doctrine of a special Providence does not threaten the moral well-being of man himself with some serious dangers. For instance, is it not likely to encourage a dreamy, listless way of waiting upon events, instead of nerving men to active exertion? Is it not suited to the life of an Oriental mystic rather than, for instance, to the busy life of the thousands of this great city who know that they must exert themselves if they would live? No, my brethren. Like other teaching, no doubt it may be abused; but between honest, and even eager, attention to business and a sincere recognition of God's Providence there is no necessary contrariety. In our own times, as of old, there are many men whose lives show how perfectly compatible is a childlike faith in God's Providence with uninterrupted exertion; nay, rather, how that faith is the very spirit and nerve of this exertion. God does not promise us each and all that if we will lie down by the brook Cherith the ravens shall come to feed us: as the proverb most truly says, He helps them that help themselves; but then it is He Who does help them, and that so materially that they could not do without Him. He kindles the brain, He nerves the arm, He sustains, through the weary hours of work, the various powers of mind or body; and the product, in one sense due to human exertion, is in a higher and truer sense His gift through it. Between our Lord's teaching and such exertion undertaken on the principle of duty, there is no opposition. Our Lord is really opposing an over-anxiety about the results of work, which is often as fatal to successful labour itself as it is to the claims upon the soul's attention of "the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

But at any rate it will be asked whether this idea of a

special Providence may not soil the purity of motive which ought to characterise the service of God. If a disinterested service is better than a mercenary one, a doctrine which promises favours and protection in return for filial goodness is, we are told, really more hostile to its higher forms than a doctrine which promises none. "Take care," men say, "lest with your Christian heaven and your special Providence you turn good and noble men into mere mercenaries, who work only for what they can get. Take care lest you fall far below the level of the teaching of the old heathen Stoics, who maintained that man ought to do his duty for its own sake, and be enthusiastic for truth and justice, only because truth and justice are what they are; and ought to find his sufficient and only reward in being allowed to contribute, or to wish to contribute, ever so little to their advancement and triumph among his fellow-creatures in his day and generation."

It would not be difficult to show that if any religion has put the highest possible value upon disinterestedness in the service of God, of truth, of duty, it is Christianity. Our Lord's own words, "hoping for nothing again," His own warning respecting the Pharisees, "They have their reward," convey the essence of His teaching on this head as far as this world is concerned. He discouraged the idea of any correspondence here between personal deserts and outward circumstances. The tower of Siloam fell upon men who were not sinners above all the Galileans; and to be prosperous and well spoken of by all is, in our Lord's judgment, a presage of coming woe. Indeed, adversity is the blessing of the Gospel, as prosperity was of the Law; and our Lord is very far from bribing men to serve Him by holding out promises of temporal success. He bids them count the cost before building the tower; He would have them consider the chalice of suffering and the baptism of blood which awaited Himself, ere they became His

servants and presumed to drink the one or to pass through the other. All things work together for the Christian's good: but it is his real, eternal good, and not his temporal wellbeing, that is in question.

It will, however, be perhaps said that "a Christian, if disinterested as far as this world goes, is not disinterested in view of the next. He hopes to be rewarded there for his efforts, his privations, his ventures—or at any rate for his faith here; and he cherishes the idea of a special Providence, because it is a warrant of that coming repayment. Now as of old Satan asks triumphantly, 'Doth Job serve God for nought?' and he finds his question answered, if not in temporal prosperity here, at least in the promise of endless happiness hereafter."

My brethren, we may at once admit that this is the fact, and that it is inevitable. God has in the long-run identified our greatest happiness with our purest service and most disinterested love of Himself. Would He have been true to His own Nature had He done otherwise? And is not this, after all, exactly what is done by those philosophers who, after ostentatiously dismissing all ideas of a Divine protection and of a future bliss, tell us forsooth that virtue is its own reward? There is then some reward in the practice of virtue; in other words, the sense of doing your duty is a reward for doing it. But does this pleasurable sense degrade a virtuous life to the level of a mercenary occupation? and if it does not, is the Christian belief in Providence and Heaven fatal to the lofty purity of Christian motives for serving God?

Enough, perhaps more than enough, has been said on the score of this very transcendental objection; it may be left to be dealt with by common sense, by the actual experience of religious men. If a wise tenderness in an earthly parent does not necessarily make a child selfish

and presuming,—if it appeals to his generosity, and fosters in him a chivalrous and self-forgetting love; then we may be sure that to believe in God's loving care here and in His promises hereafter does not impair one whit the desire felt by pure and noble souls to seek and serve Him for His own sake, because, being what He is, He is worthy of the best service that can be rendered to Him.

IV.

It is not difficult to realise this faith in God's Providence in the sunshine of our days; when we have homes, friends, abundance, freedom from pressing care, yet interests which occupy us without becoming anxieties. It is not difficult to bless God amid tokens of temporal prosperity, though, alas! it is only too easy to forget Him. But faith in His Providence is most precious in His eyes, and to us, when it has been tested by adversity. To believe in it still when plans are failing and friends are few, when health is broken, and, with broken health, poverty perhaps hard at the door; when disappointment here and suffering there have done their work—this is our difficulty; this might be our triumph. How many thousands in Europe have within the past few weeks faced this sore trial in all its bitterness, faced it for the first time in their lives —amid the ruin of all that made this world welcome, amid scenes of desolation and blood! How many families in England, gentle and simple, have faced it, in losing the stay of their home, as the great warship sank the other night beneath the waters![1] Let us pray for them, that they may cast all their care upon God, Who careth for them; that they may enter into the spirit of that great prophet, who, as the dark shadows of the captivity were falling around his country, could exclaim, "Although the

[1] The allusions are to the Franco-Prussian war, and to the foundering of H.M.S. *Captain* on Sept. 7, 1870.

fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."[1] Yes, that is why belief in Providence is so of the essence of the Christian life; it sends us to God's feet in prayer. The very breath of the Christian life, the spiritual movement which shows, like the action of the lungs, that a Christian lives, is prayer. And prayer is impossible where there is no belief in a Providence. Prayer to a Destiny, to a Soul of the World, to a hierarchy of laws, to an unintelligent Force, or to an impotent Intelligence, or to a capricious Omnipotence, is impossible. Prayer is the expression of love and trust in a Personal Being, Who is at once All-powerful and All-good. Deny His freedom, or deny His benevolence, the result is the same: prayer is useless. And when men cease to pray, they cease in any spiritual sense to live. They may obey a certain social and moral code, with exactness, even with enthusiasm; but of the One Being Who is alone on His own account worth knowing and loving and living for, and in Whose knowledge is life eternal, they know, alas! nothing, or they imagine something worse than nothing.

Belief in a Providence is, if I may say so, the soil in which the Christian faith naturally takes root. Of such beliefs the truths of the Christian creed are the highest, the consummate expression.

The one culminating proof of God's loving care for men, in the whole course of human history, is the Incarnation and Birth and Life and Death and Resurrection and Ascension and Intercession of Jesus Christ. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have

[1] Hab. iii. 17, 18.

everlasting life."[1] Thus to us Christians Providence is not an abstract attribute; Providence is a living Person. Jesus Himself, God and Man, is the Providence of the Christian Church, of the Christian soul. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[2] "I will not leave you comfortless."[3] "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."[4] "Ye shall eat and drink at My table, in My kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."[5] "I go to prepare a place for you: I will come again, and receive you unto Myself."[6] "My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed."[7] He is indeed our Good Shepherd, so that we may lack nothing. It is He Who encourages us with His voice, and guides us with His eye, and feeds us in green pastures with the Bread of heaven, and washes us in His cleansing Blood from the stains we gather along the road of life. In each joy, each sorrow, each friend, each opposition that has befallen us, He has been near; and beyond them all, beyond the horizon, which our eyesight cannot pass, He too still awaits us, to crown the years of care and love through which He has tended us, by receiving us at length with the arms of His mercy into our Eternal Home! If the lilies of the field are so beautiful, what will be the beauty of the white garments of the Saints! Let us think, often and deeply, of that future; and let us in the present take our parts.

[1] St. John iii. 16. [2] St. Matt. xxviii. 20. [3] St. John xiv. 18.
[4] St. Matt. xi. 28. [5] St. Luke xxii. 30. [6] St. John xiv. 3.
[7] St. John vi. 55.

SERMON IV.

FAITH THE MEASURE OF DIVINE BLESSING.

St. Matt. viii. 13.

As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.

THIS was our Lord's last word to the centurion who had asked Him, when entering into Capernaum, to heal his paralysed servant. The account of the miracle is given in two Evangelists, St. Matthew and St. Luke. The story, always interesting, is, perhaps, especially interesting just now, when military persons and proceedings are largely canvassed in the press, and are a subject of painful interest in many English households.[1] At such a time it is natural to think about the soldiers who appear in the New Testament; and this must, apparently, be said about them, that their profession is more honourably mentioned in it than are, at least, several classes of civilians. Our Lord never employs such severe terms in speaking of soldiers as He does with reference to the literary classes, such as the scribes and lawyers, or to religious sects, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. The more prominent soldiers of the New Testament—the centurion who commanded on Mount Calvary, the centurion Cornelius the first Gentile convert of St. Peter, and in an earlier day this centurion of Capernaum,—all illustrate the higher side of the military character; its generosity, its openness, its great capacities for the tenderness and humility which

[1] This sermon was preached in August 1882, during the Egyptian war.

often go hand in hand with conscious strength. And of these soldiers, the centurion of Capernaum is certainly not the least engaging; he is in some respects one of the most interesting figures in the Gospel story. The tender concern of this officer for his sick slave implies a natural trait of disposition by no means common among the wealthier Romans, who often treated their servants as chattels possessing no rights whatever, and having no claims to consideration; and his application for assistance to our Lord at this early stage in His ministry is, of itself, considering the circumstances, most remarkable. We shall do well to consider our Lord's words to him: "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

I.

"As thou hast believed." Observe that our Lord did not heal the centurion's servant at once. He might have done so. But He delays; He allows time for hesitation, for explanation, for perseverance; He allows time for the play and energy of faith. He has in view, not merely, or chiefly, the working of a miracle, not even the doing a work of benevolence and mercy, but especially the growth and progress of a soul in the exercise of the virtue or grace of faith.

"As thou hast believed." What were the characteristics of the faith of the centurion of Capernaum?

1. First of all, his faith seems to have been a thing of gradual growth, and it grew amid no ordinary difficulties. You will remember that Judæa was a conquered country, and the Roman troops were so placed in various stations as to secure social order and the regular payment of the taxes. Probably at Capernaum there was a small company of soldiers under the command of this officer: it would have been answerable for the condition of the sur-

rounding district. The centurion himself was certainly a heathen; possibly he was an Italian: and many a man in his position would have been likely to look on the religion of the peasantry around him with an entire want of intelligence and sympathy. But this officer must have been led to see, that however superior the Romans were to their Jewish subjects in all the qualities which build up empire and which promote material success in life, the Jews were somehow in possession of a higher truth than were their conquerors. We know not what features of the Jewish religion attracted him; whether its proclamation of the idea of righteousness, or its great history and sacred literature, or its hold upon the people in days of darkness and suffering, or its pervading union of pathos and strength. But of the attraction there can be no question. The centurion had actually built a new synagogue in Capernaum, — not improbably the very synagogue in which our Lord preached the great sermon on His Body and Blood which is reported by St. John.[1] The Jews saw in this act a proof of friendship for their race, which, as St. Luke tells us, led them to intercede for him with our Lord.[2] The political instinct which would lose no opportunity of conciliating a subject people, the social instinct which would soften, if possible, the harsh relations of conquerors and conquered, or the mere animal impulse of uncalculating good-nature,—these would have been held to explain the act of a presumably heathen officer in building a Jewish synagogue. But it is more than probable that the true explanation lay deeper: that the Jewish revelation was exerting over a vivid moral nature the fascination which is an attribute of any measure of truth; and that the building a new synagogue was an act expressing, if not conviction or conversion, at least that kind of interest which precedes these things in an

[1] St. John vi. 26 58 [2] St. Luke vii. 4, 5.

honest and good heart. And then, as it always is, this one practical step towards truth brought him nearer to a second and a greater. The closer interest which he took in the religion of Israel would have sooner or later led him to notice the ever spreading fame of the Prophet of Nazareth. And as he collected and compared the reports of the works and sayings of this Prophet, he would have caught glimpses of a higher truth than that which was taught in his new synagogue;—glimpses of a Revelation beyond a Revelation, of a higher and more perfect Self-unveiling of God beyond a partial and a relatively obscure one. Before the centurion made up his mind to apply to our Lord to heal his servant, he must have satisfied himself that he was making application to a superhuman Person: but how much does this imply as to the progress which he had made on the road towards truth, and how great the difficulties under which he had made it! No help could have come from the memories of youth, or from the sympathy of friends, or from the associations of home, or the opinions of those whom he had regarded or heard of as the best and wisest of mankind. All these influences, in his case, would have told against faith. Some of us often think, perhaps, that if we were more favourably circumstanced than we are we should be better believers; we think that, but for the intellectual and moral atmosphere of the office, or the mess-room, or the club, or the lecture-room, we should be devout servants of Christ. Circumstances have indeed their weight; but their weight is less than necessarily decisive; and when adverse circumstances do not kill faith they brace it. The faith of the centurion was not the less vigorous, we may be sure, because it had triumphed over so many difficulties; just as the pine-tree holds on with most tenacity to the rock into the crevices of which it has driven its roots with most laborious effort.

2. "As thou hast believed." The centurion's faith was marked, secondly, by thoroughness. There were no flaws running across it, and producing hesitation at a critical moment: he had seen and heard enough to be sure that Jesus Christ was at least a superhuman Person, with vast powers over the world of nature. The illustration which he gives shows that the power of our Lord over disease, over the agencies which affect it, over those invisible beings the angels, who—so Holy Scripture teaches—act in ways unsuspected by us upon the natural world, was just as real to him as his own authority as an officer in the Roman army. "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." With this experience of the obedience of his fellow-men to his own authority, how could he doubt the power of Jesus Christ over beings of a higher order and in a larger sphere? It was a vigour and degree of faith most remarkable in a man of heathen antecedents: our Lord pronounced it higher than any He had met with among His own countrymen. "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." And then, on the strength of this, He went on to predict the different ways in which the heathens and the Jews would a few years afterwards welcome His Church: "And I say unto you, That many" heathen "shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom"—the Jews, its natural subjects—"shall be cast out into outer darkness."

Doubtless this thoroughness in the centurion's faith was very pleasing to our Lord. It was the saying of a shrewd thinker: "If it is worth while being a Christian at all, it is better to be a downright Christian." The half-and-half Christianity which would retract with one hand what

it has conceded with the other, which accepts the principle of faith, and then is frightened at its application, which begins to say its creed and then hesitates to go on with it, which thinks to buy off the opposition of unbelief by concessions which are held worthless except as instalments of the whole—this temper certainly was not that of the centurion. They may well be pitied who forego the satisfactions, such as they are, of irreligious intellect without securing the true consolations of faith; faith is not faith, it is but the pale shadow of belief, unless it be thorough.

3. "As thou hast believed." A third characteristic of the centurion's faith was its humility. Our modern experience may tell us that faith and humility do not always go hand in hand. Faith is sometimes looked upon as a distinction which entitles its possessor to take liberties with God. No doubt our Lord, in His loving condescension, does invite the confidence and affection of those who really take Him at His word; but this invitation can never safely dispense with a sense of our unworthiness, or of the distance which separates the Creator from the creature. We sometimes hear language about our Lord, prayers and hymns addressed to Him, which no doubt proceed from an earnest faith in Him, or at least in certain truths about Him, but which are conspicuously wanting in the reverence and lowliness which are so striking in the centurion. When the centurion made up his mind to approach our Lord on behalf of his paralysed servant, he was so conscious of his unworthiness to venture into such a Presence, that he applied—so St. Luke tells us—to the elders of the synagogue to intercede for him: "When he heard of Jesus, he sent unto Him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant." When our Lord offered to come and heal the patient, the centurion replied: "Lord,

I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." True faith is not insensible to the nearness and tenderness of God, but it is also alive to His awful Majesty; the true believer sees God and himself in too clear a light to venture upon the familiarities which are sometimes mistaken for faith's indispensable accompaniments.

II.

Such was the faith of the centurion—the child of hardship, yet strong, thorough, reverent, humble. And our Lord deigned to mark it with His especial approval,—to set it forth as the measure of the work of mercy which He would Himself presently achieve: "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee";—as He said, in a parallel case, to the Syrophœnician woman when pleading for her daughter, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."[1] Evidently He meant to show that faith in Himself would have consequences of momentous import. The distinctly religious power of faith was to be suggested by its power in the physical world: the cure of the poor servant's paralysed body would be no imperfect representation in the world of sense of the effect of faith upon the human soul. But here it is impossible not to ask the question, Why should such a disposition, such an effort as faith, have this power? The question has been asked by friends and foes, and it will be worth while to consider it.

1. One reason, then, for the religious power of faith is that it involves knowledge—knowledge of facts which are of the first importance to the religious wellbeing of man. Faith is a telescope which discovers to the beholder a world of facts not visible to the naked eye; it is a

[1] St. Matt. xv. 28.

second sight which penetrates into spheres altogether removed from ordinary experience. It is a faculty which places at the disposal of man a great deal of knowledge on the most momentous of all subjects, not otherwise attainable; and here, as always, nay rather, here especially, knowledge is power. To know and to have constantly before the mind, as things which it sees, Who and What God is, what are His relations with us, and ours with Him, what are the reasons for our being here, and the powers and influences that affect us, and the destiny that awaits us when we go hence, is to be in a very different position indeed from that of the man to whom all these momentous subjects are a blank, or a matter of guess-work. At the time of the Franco-German war, twelve years ago, the successes of the Germans were largely attributed to the superiority of their Intelligence Department: they knew so much more about the strength and position of the enemy, and their own available resources, than did the French. Well, faith supplies the intelligence department of the soul; it reports all that is of most importance to a being who is wrestling, "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."[1] True, such information may not be acted on; the truant will often prevails against the common-sense of faith; but faith does supply the information, which may be acted on, and thus it contributes very efficiently to a first condition of religious success.

2. A second reason for the religious power of faith is that it is a test or criterion of the predominant dispositions of the soul or character. Why, when Revelation offers itself to two men of equal intellectual powers and equal opportunities, does one accept and the other reject it? Because

[1] Eph. vi. 12.

the believer has moral affinities with the Revelation, in which the other is deficient; because the non-believer has a moral temper which checks and thwarts the movement of the soul towards a perfectly Holy Object external to itself. Faith, although a Divine grace, must strike its roots into the depths of character: character is the soil in which, as the case may be, it grows, flourishes, or withers away.

Thus we see in the Gospels how jealousy made faith in our Lord almost impossible on the part of the Scribes and Pharisees. They envied Him His influence, His convincing method of teaching, His lofty idea and account of righteousness. Jealousy cannot help depreciating its object; and this depreciation is of itself fatal to the growth of faith.

In the same way a scornful or satirical temper destroys that power of true moral judgment which precedes faith. There were many persons possessed with that temper in Judæa in our Lord's time; and they indulged it, just as people do now, in sneers and epigrams which, no doubt, had a certain social success. The men who first said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"[1] or, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"[2] or, "He hath a devil,"[3] got, we may be sure, a good deal of credit for their sayings, and reflected with much satisfaction on their achievements. How telling must that offhand blasphemy at the foot of the Cross have sounded: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save!"[4] Nothing withers up the finer fibres of the soul, nothing blinds the spiritual eye so surely and fatally, as a scornful temper; nothing makes faith, humanly speaking, so almost impossible. Can we wonder that God does not reveal Himself to a temper which in a brother man would check the utterance of a generous

[1] St. John i. 46.
[2] *Ib.* vi. 52.
[3] St. Matt. xi. 18.
[4] St. Matt. xxvii. 42.

emotion, lest what was sacred to us should be desecrated by a responsive sneer?

Once more, a habit of insincerity is fatal to faith. Those who flattered our Lord while they secretly envied or disliked Him were moving further and further away from that moral region in which faith is possible. "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"[1] "We know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth:"[2] "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee:"[3]—all this was the language of insincere courtesy, and in each case our Lord rejected it: "Why callest thou Me good?" "Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites?" "Rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Those who employ compliments which they do not mean are not slow to despise the object of such compliments if he accepts them. They get to think of excellence, not as a thing to be realised in life, but only as a thing to be expressed in phrases. Their faith in goodness is generally in the inverse ratio of their capacity of talking about it.

True faith in a perfectly holy Being is a test of character, a test of moral sincerity, a test of the absence of a false or scornful or jealous disposition. It is indeed also a test of much else; and thus we see why in the case of this centurion, as in other cases, our Lord sets such high store upon it. The Eternal Wisdom is justified of her true children; but, so far as experience goes, of none besides them.

3. A third reason for the religious power of faith is that it is leverage; it sets the soul in motion; it implies and embodies an element of will. The action of faith is not merely represented to us in Scripture by that of the eye; it is also represented by that of the hand. When Holy Scripture speaks of a believing Christian as

[1] St. Luke x. 25. [2] St. Matt. xxii. 16. [3] St. Luke xi. 27.

"apprehending"[1] or "laying hold"[2] on Christ our Lord, this implies that faith is a hand as well as an eye,—not merely spiritualised intelligence, but spiritualised will. The faith which justifies does not merely behold, it claims its Object; and the effort of will which is thus inseparable from faith means energy in many more directions than one. The effort to rise towards God, to lay hold on His gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ, implies effort of various kinds besides; and thus the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to showing that faith is essentially a practical power. Abel's more excellent sacrifice, Enoch's pleasing God, Noah's preparing the ark, Abraham's going out from the land of his birth not knowing whither he went, his sojourn in Canaan, his sacrifice of Isaac, Sarah's conceiving when she was past age, the blessings which Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph successively pronounced on their descendants, the renunciation of Pharaoh's court by Moses, the observance of the Passover, the passage of the Red Sea, Joshua before Jericho, Rahab entertaining the spies, and the long line of saints and worthies who are hinted at down to the Maccabean martyrs,—these all illustrate the relation of faith to the will, to practical effort, to sustained endurance. No chapter in the New Testament better enables us to read the Old Testament with new or Christian eyes, and to understand how, in all the ages of man's spiritual history, the faith which has bridged over abysses between earth and heaven has been, in St. Paul's words to the Galatians, a faith that worketh by love[3]—love towards God, and, for His sake, towards man.

These are some of the reasons why faith is endowed with such power. But here a caution is necessary;—faith does not create, it only apprehends its object. No doubt there have been instances of bodily cures effected, so far

[1] Phil. iii. 12. [2] 1 Tim. vi. 12. [3] Gal. v. 6.

as is known, by a patient's persistent exercise of will or by vivid working of imagination. Absolute confidence in a given remedy, or in a particular medical adviser—a confidence which attributes to the adviser or the remedy ideal qualities of wisdom and efficacy,—will sometimes produce effects which have been compared—I do not say with what propriety—with a certain class of miracles in the Gospel. But at any rate these examples cannot apply to the miracle before us; they can only apply, if at all, to cases in which the believer and the patient are one and the same person. There is no such natural explanation to be given of the healing of the centurion's servant. The servant was at a distance, and ignorant of what was passing, and must have been healed by a power altogether independent of his own consciousness; while the centurion's faith could not have had any natural effect on the physical constitution of another man.

This is a point which requires insisting on, as it is not merely in unbelieving quarters that faith is practically credited with a capacity for creating its object. Brethren, the Object of faith is there, whether we believe it or not. The power of Jesus to heal the centurion's servant in no way depended upon the centurion's faith in it; although His power was exerted as a token of His approval of that faith. God is not the less what He is, Almighty, All-wise, All-good, whether we believe in Him or not. Jesus is not the less God and Man, our merciful Redeemer, "the full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Propitiation, and Satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," the future Judge of all mankind, our future Judge, whether we believe in Him or not. Holy Scripture is inspired, whether you or I recognise its inspiration or not. Christ is present in the Sacrament of His love, whether we believe Him to be there or not. These Divine facts are wholly independent of our consciousness; they are,

as we say, objective, although they must most assuredly be apprehended by our consciousness, if they are to be blessings to us. And this apprehension is faith, which does not create its Object any more than the natural eye creates the sun by beholding it in the heavens, but which does establish a relation between that Object and the soul, which is of the highest moment to our spiritual wellbeing.

III.

"As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." Eighteen centuries have not weakened the force of these Divine words. They are true to-day of nations. The people which clings resolutely to the Christian faith finds its reward even here in that public righteousness which exalteth a nation,[1] which elevates and purifies social life at home, and inspires respect abroad. They are true of Churches. The Church which cares more for the faith once delivered to the saints than for the kind of popularity which is often to be won cheaply by concessions to the anti-religious or the superstitious spirit of the day, finds its reward even here in the consciousness of spiritual vigour, in that attachment of honest and true hearts which is a Church's earnest of usefulness and strength. They are true to-day of souls. The soul which believes heartily is also the soul which hopes and loves; and it finds in the ratio of its hold on the invisible world, and on that Divine Saviour Who is its King, a supply of grace and blessings which change the face of this world, and which make earth a foretaste of heaven.

Let us then pray God to give us a faith like that of the centurion, persevering, thorough, and humble. Without faith, as His Apostle has told us, we cannot hope to please

[1] Prov. xiii. 34.

Him,[1] or to meet the great issues of life and death. Certainly reason may and must prepare the way of faith in the soul, by removing obstacles to it, by exploring and answering objections, by marshalling and developing the considerations which warrant its reasonableness. But the act of believing; the flash of light, which makes the distant and the invisible present to the soul; the felt exercise of a new sense, which is in its working so vitally different a thing from the mere acceptance of the outcome of a successful argument; "the substance" or realisation "of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," [2] which makes them present to us—this is God's gift now as of old. And now as of old it is given to those who ask for it: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may see wonderful things out of Thy law." [3]

[1] Heb. xi. 6. [2] *Ib.* xi. 1. [3] Ps. cxix. 18.

SERMON V.

OBEDIENCE, NOT PROFESSION, THE CONDITION OF ACCEPTANCE.

ST. MATT. vii. 21.

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in heaven.

THESE solemn words are familiar to us, not merely as the closing words of to-day's[1] Gospel, but from their place among the Offertory Sentences in the Communion Service, where they stand like the cherubim with flaming sword at the gate of the garden, to keep the way of the tree of life. They are, in fact, the opening words of the concluding and most solemn paragraph of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount—that paragraph in which He applies to all the subjects of the new kingdom what He had just been saying about the false prophets.

By the false prophets He meant particular members of the Scribe and Pharisee class, who would have occurred to the minds of those whom He addressed,—men who seemed to be one thing and who were another. They came before the world in the garb of innocence—in sheep's clothing; they were inwardly destroyers of the peace and light of human souls,—as our Lord expressed it, "ravening wolves.' If it was objected that they professed to do a great deal of good, our Lord replies that this profession must be tested by experience. Nature generally does not support the opinion

[1] The eighth Sunday after Trinity.

that men can produce moral work of a different quality from that of their real character. Experience points to a broad average correspondence between what men do and what they are; between character and action; and, therefore, action is upon the whole a true, nay, the true, test of character.

The moral nature and outward activity of man is just as much an organic whole as the trunk and fruit of a tree; the fruit is the test of what the tree is. The false prophets might say what they pleased; their actions showed what they really were; they were not better than they were because they could talk impressively on questions of duty. "Do men" (our Lord asked, in the words of a current proverb), "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

If our Lord had stopped at this point, the bulk of His hearers, and especially of those who had become, or who were on the point of becoming, His disciples, would have gone home in high spirits, and on very good terms with themselves. It is very tolerable to most of us,—very animating to a great many of us,—to hear people or classes of people condemned for sins or inconsistencies which we have no chance of committing, to which we have no temptation, and to reflect how very shocking it is that there should be such sins and inconsistencies in the world we live in. Our Lord knew human nature too thoroughly to flatter one of the least amiable of its weaknesses; and He therefore proceeds to show that His disciples themselves, many of them, might be in just the same moral condition as that of the false prophets. They might be men of profession without being men of action; men of words without

obedience. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Now it cannot, I think, be questioned that by "the kingdom of heaven" our Lord means, in the first instance, the new spiritual society of men which He was on the point of establishing under that name upon earth; a "kingdom" which, although of earth so far as its scene and subjects were concerned, was to be of heaven in its principles, drift, and spirit. He began his ministry by bidding men repent because this "kingdom of heaven" was at hand. He invited all to press into it; He said that it was like a net let down into the sea of humanity and enclosing fish of various kinds; that it was like the field in which many a tare would grow along with the wheat. Yet though it was in the event to contain many who, while in it, would not be of it, there would be not a few drawn by various motives towards the Person of the King, who yet would never even enter the kingdom. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;" but he who does not merely profess,—he who does not merely feel,—he who obeys what in this matter is the will of God, he that by formed habit, and in this instance because of it, doeth the will of My Father Which is in heaven.

Not that this exhausts the meaning of these solemn words. In its deepest sense "the kingdom of heaven" is the kingdom of souls in the eternal world, from which the weakness and imperfections which abound in the kingdom here are excluded. "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."[1] The eternal kingdom which God has promised through Christ our Lord is clearly in our Lord's own mind in the words which follow those of

[1] Rev. xxi. 27.

the text: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you." Even great works done without charity and faith, done from ostentation, or for earthly ends, will be worse than worthless before the Throne of Christ. This is a truth beyond that suggested by the text; but it shows the real power and force of our Lord's words:—mere profession of adhesion to Christ, however reiterated and enthusiastic, is no passport of entrance into the Kingdom.

I.

See here the disinterestedness of our Lord's love for souls. He seeks men not for His own sake, but for theirs. He had nothing to gain by their adhesion to His teaching, to His Person, to the new society which He was on the point of founding. He was what He was, in His spotless purity, in His unassailable majesty, in His imperturbable repose, whether the Jewish people followed Him or not; and if He asked men to come to Him, to follow Him, to give Him love, honour, trust, worship, it was because the gift would benefit not Himself but them. And this being so, it was of the first importance that those who did obey His call, since they do it for their own advantage, not for His, should do it simply and thoroughly; should play no tricks with themselves, as they could play none with Him; should yield not merely an obedience of the lips but an obedience of the will, not merely an outward but an inward homage. Rather than accept professions of loyalty which were not thoroughly sincere, He would discourage advances—not, of course, finally, but for the moment. He would bid men think well ere they made

professions of which they might repent, or which they did not really mean.

So it happened that when a person professed that he was ready to follow our Lord whithersoever He went, our Lord did not at once accept the profession. He merely said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."[1] As if to say: "Have you really reflected on all that this profession means?" When the sons of Zebedee, through their mother, asked that they might cast their lot with Him, and have places of trust and honour in His kingdom, He asked them in turn "whether they were prepared to drink the cup that He would drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with:"[2] had they considered what was meant by following the Crucified? When the young ruler, a person evidently of consideration and influence, addressed Him in conventional language as "Good Master," our Lord said abruptly, "Why callest thou Me good?"[3] and then told him that he lacked the most important condition of discipleship. When St. Peter, speaking for his brethren and himself, said, out of the fervour and devotion of his heart, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," our Lord said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"[4] St. Peter, our Lord implies, was carried away by his enthusiasm: he might answer for himself, he had better not make professions for others of whose state before God he knew nothing. When great multitudes followed Him, He turned and said, 'Except a man hated brother, and sister, and wife, and self, for His sake, he could not be a disciple.'[5] As much as to say, 'Do you all really mean to make My service an object in life, to which everything else must, under all circum-

[1] St. Matt. viii. 20. [2] *Ib.* xx. 22. [3] *Ib.* xix. 17.
[4] St. John vi. 68-70. [5] St. Luke xiv. 25, 26.

stances, give way?' And so in the text, when, at the close of His Sermon on the Mount, the multitude around Him, entranced by the power of a teaching which they felt had a moral authority for which they looked in vain in the teaching of the Scribes, were visibly willing to make protestations of attachment and service, He observes solemnly: "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in heaven."

How different this is from what we often see in the world! A public man, for instance, who wishes to get into Parliament, or to carry a measure there, says, "The only thing that I want, gentlemen, is your support; what I look to is your votes. If you will return or support me, you may think, feel, be what you like; the practical question is whether you will help me at the right moment by your suffrages." This is natural enough, because politics are concerned not with individual character but with public measures. But the same thing may be witnessed in some of the Churches of Christ. When, for instance, quite recently, a totally new doctrine about the infallibility of all the Popes was imposed upon members of the Roman Catholic Church, and, as was very natural, certain members of that Church in high office said that they could not conscientiously believe what had never before been taught to be a part of the Christian Revelation, it was practically said to them: "What we want is your outward adhesion: you must not contradict the new definition: we must present to the world a united front, and, if you remain with us, you must say what we do; the rest is a question between God and your conscience, upon which we do not enter."

And do we not sometimes hear the same language used nearer home? "The idea of an Established Church," it has been said, "is to find a home for all the religious opinions

which are entertained by the nation"; and in accordance with this principle, what is asked for in these quarters is not loyalty to the revealed truth of Christ so much as practical attachment to the Establishment. Men may think what they like about our Lord, about the Atonement, about Holy Scripture, about the Sacraments, about the value of prayer, about repentance;—but let them, before all things, deem it necessary to uphold an Established Church,—a much greater and more sacred thing, it is thus implied, than any creed or conviction! My brethren, I do not undervalue the many blessings of an Established Church: but to ask support for it, while professing indifference to the truths which it represents, is, with all serious minds, to do it deep and lasting injury. After all, the Faith of Jesus Christ does not exist for the sake of justifying the existence of an Established Church; the Church exists for the sake of teaching the Faith. Mere support of an institution, combined with indifference to the truths which it represents, can only rest upon motives which religion may not recognise; and is likely, in the long-run, to defeat the object of its enthusiasm.

How deep and broad is the difference between these estimates of the value of adhesion to a doctrine or an institution and our Lord's! With Him the question is, the good of the convert; with others, the strength of the institution. They ask what is the support thus brought worth: He asks what is the sincerity of the act of adhesion. He would have simple integrity of purpose: they such practical efforts or professions as will have weight with the world. They are thinking of what meets the eye;—of the present and the material: He of that which is beyond the ken of sense;—of the interests of the human spirit,—of the Eternal World.

II.

"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord." To what persons or class of persons does our Lord refer?

(*a*) First of all, we must suppose that He alludes to some *bonâ fide* hypocrites—that is, men who acted a part, men who professed what they did not mean or feel. Such there would probably have been even among the first disciples. Certainly the temptations to hypocrisy were few and slight in that opening age; a man did not gain anything by discipleship, commonly speaking. For at least three hundred years after Christ it was in no sense worth a man's while to be a Christian, unless a man felt sure that Christianity was true. Our Lord, however, speaks not merely to those who heard Him, but with prophetic foresight, to all the ages of His Church; and, even among His first disciples, all were not true men. Of the twelve whom He had chosen, one, He said, was "a devil." When our Lord was being hailed as a great Teacher and Deliverer by the populations of Galilee, there was room for hypocrisy, in its rudest sense; and Judas had the common purse in his keeping, and was thus tied down, by a powerful motive of self-interest, to an insincere profession.

At particular times in history, the temptation to hypocrisy of this coarse kind has been very strong, and has been very largely yielded to. One such period was the reign of Louis XIV. in France, when, in order to attain to any post of influence whatever, it was necessary to be of the religion of the Court. The consequence was the growth of characters such as Molière described;—Tartuffes of many types and in many ranks of society. Another such period was the Puritan ascendancy in England after the defeat and public murder of Charles I. Men found it useful, in order to get on in the army or in parliament,

to use Scriptural phrases in their ordinary conversation and to affect a particular tone of voice; these things were taken for marks of godliness and conversion. The result was the licence and indifference which followed the Restoration; just as the hollow professions of the days of the great Bourbon monarch led on to the laxity of the next reign and the infidelities and blasphemies of the Revolution. In the same way, we may often observe that children who have been carelessly taught to use religious language without meaning it, become conspicuously irreligious when they grow up; the sense of honesty being enlisted against religion, and the recoil from conscious insincerity being proportionately violent to the degree in which such insincerity was practically enforced.

There is much less temptation to such hypocrisy in these days or in this country. Nothing particularly is gained in a worldly sense, and something may be lost by an earnest profession of religion. A young man of education and ability knows perfectly well that if his highest object in life be money or distinction, there are better things to do with himself than to take Holy Orders. And in general society a man does not now lose caste, as he did twenty years ago, by avowing his disbelief in Christianity. We may be tempted to regret the change; but there are two sides to it. There are reasons for believing that those who do take Orders now do so with purer and higher motives than the bulk of their predecessors; and an avowed unbelief is far less dangerous than an unwilling and forced and hollow conformity. Nothing can so injure the moral sense as an insincere profession,—allegiance to secretly rejected truth; be the motive of that profession what it may. To repeat creeds which we do not heartily believe, to say prayers to a Being Whose hearing us seems to us problematical, is to inflict upon the moral fibre of the soul the deadliest

wound: it is to establish the reign of falsehood in the temple of conscience. Far better is silence—the silence of disbelief or the silence of doubt,—than this profane disregard of the sanctities of language: than this deepest self-degradation of a soul which can consent, for whatever reasons, to professions which it does not mean.

(β) But hypocrisy of this coarse and conscious kind is too great a violence to the better side of human nature to be common in any age. Our Lord glances at something more natural, more subtle;—as it might seem to us, more pardonable. There is such a thing as being carried away by a torrent of enthusiasm into words and actions which, left to ourselves, we do not mean. It is not ourselves, but only our sympathy with the enthusiasm of others which cries "Lord, Lord." We are social creatures, and in all kinds of ways we submit to and reflect the influence of society. And a great enthusiasm controlling many minds and hearts, and impelled and guided by a few powerful characters, always has the effect of extorting a certain percentage of homage from those who do not really share its determining motives. Everything is moving round them; they do not quite see why, but they think that they must be moving too. They fall in with the stream, not as seeing that it is running in the right direction, but because it is strong, and compliance is easier than resistance. They use the language of a position, of a particular epoch, of a certain circle; they take up the accents of that universal chaunt which rises on all sides around them; they fall into the ranks of the host which proclaims that it is moving forward to the regeneration of the world, and keep time, without thinking, whether it be in language or action, as others do around them.

I am far from saying that the power of enthusiasm around us is a bad thing, or that a man may not be led

by it towards a true knowledge of God, and to a solid practice of religion. But a great many persons who undergo the influence of an enthusiasm of this kind are only carried by it up to a point which is short of complete and sincere adhesion to the truth which it represents, and imagine themselves to be convinced when they only have caught a breath of sympathetic feeling. They lose themselves in the language, sympathies, activities of others around them. They think that they are what others are, what they ought to be. Others say, "Lord, Lord," so do they; not without wishing to be on the right side; not without a certain superficial sincerity.

And yet, of course, a day must come when every soul must stand alone—with its own stock of reality of purpose, and no other—face to face with itself, face to face with God. The borrowed glow of other souls will not help us then. The conventional language which we used only because others used it will not serve us then. The power of an enthusiasm which others felt, and which has swept by us and left us at bottom hard and cold, will not sustain us then. Nothing will then help us that is not genuinely our own; our own in this sense, that we mean it with all the purpose and intensity of the soul, whether others mean it or not.

(γ) For, once more (and this I have in part anticipated), "Lord, Lord," is sometimes the voice of feeling as distinct from conviction. Human feeling is often strangely independent of the sense of reality,—of truth. One sees this in the influence of theatrical representations and of works of fiction, and it is one of the ways in which works of the kind may possibly do injury to the character. People go into floods of tears over a story which they know has no foundation in fact; but their feelings are enlisted, and express themselves, for the moment, naturally and sincerely. Certainly this seems to involve loss, since it is an

expenditure of valuable force upon unreality. We are finite creatures after all; we have little enough, whether of thought, or feeling, or resolution, to dispose of during this our short day of life; and we can ill afford to waste any of our little stock upon shadows of the imagination, when there are so many stern or sad facts which might well engross more than we can give.

This readiness to invest feeling in the cause of that which we do not recognise as true extends itself to religion. Feeling, of course, has its due sphere in the religious life of the soul, and a very important and attractive sphere that is. Its duty is to recognise the beauty of truth; and without this tender and engaging recognition, which feeling only can give, the hard, logical sense of truth as truth would be a poor, and I had almost said an impotent, thing for the elevation of the soul. But then feeling must follow, it must not precede conviction; or it will soon get us into trouble. When people begin to say to themselves, "How beautiful this or that doctrine is!" without concerning themselves with the prior question of its truth, there is no saying where they may not wander amid the paths of error. And when feeling, not resting upon the sense of truth, cries "Lord, Lord," it is not the soul itself which speaks; the cry represents not a truth which rules a personal spirit, but an impulse, longer or shorter, playing upon its surface, and certainly not controlling or representing its real drift.

In short, our Lord seems here to contrast genuine religion with mere devoutness, divorced from a religious sense of duty. There is no doubt a tendency in our day to run down devotion as if it were an unnecessary, and even an effeminate, appendage to that which is of substantial value in the soul's life, viz., moral excellence. This depreciation of devotion is itself the certain symptom of a dead or dying faith. If a man says to me, "I do

not make any professions at all; I do not say any creeds or prayers; I try to do my duty to my fellow-men; and, at any rate, I escape the rebuke of Jesus Christ directed against those who say more than they mean," I can only say to him, "My friend, you remind me of the man who said that he would be perfectly honest, and would avow that when he had a chance of taking what was not his own without the risk of detection he did so." Surely honesty in avowing what is wrong does not condone what is wrong; ungodliness is not respectable because it is not hypocrisy. Devotion is the soul's answer to the sight of God,—like the singing of the birds at the rising sun. When God, in the awe and majesty of His attributes, when the Incarnate Son, in all the grace and tenderness of His earthly life, when the Blessed Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of all true life to the human spirit, are present as facts to the eye of the soul, devotion follows as a matter of course. Not to be devout is not to be believing; devotion is the common sense of faith. If I see the living God,—so powerful, so wise, so loving, so magnificent,—I naturally speak to Him; not only because I know that He can hear and that He will help me, but because He is there, and to speak with Him is at once the highest privilege and the best and purest instinct of my humanity. But, on the other hand, there is such a thing as devotion, that is, active feeling, divorced from religious obedience; and this is censured by our Lord in the text. There are lives in which passionate bursts of feeling, strong and tender, towards our Lord, His Person, His Passion, His gifts, His Church, alternate with disobedience, deliberate and repeated, to God's known will; and here there is a constant disposition to think that the disobedience is atoned for by the warmth of feeling. Few delusions can be more fatal. It is not feeling but conscience which is the measure of our state before God. "If ye love Me, keep

My commandments."[1] "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"[2] How fearful would be the awakening to find that the words of entreaty so often on our lips here, and representing so much fervour, as we thought, are powerless at the gate of Paradise; to find that we have mistaken a surface current of the soul for its deepest and central life!

Our business is—not to give up devotion, but to be sincere about it—to say "Lord, Lord," meaning that we acknowledge, in our weakness, the rights of Him Whom we thus address; conscious of our imperfections, but at heart sincere in our intention of obeying. He does not expect more than sincerity of purpose: His Blood, His Spirit, His Sacraments, His intercession with the Father, will do the rest.

It has been well and powerfully said, that man's great work in life is the establishment of the reign of truth in the soul and character. Truth of language: so that what we say may express accurately, without exaggeration, without concealment, what we feel. Truth of feeling: so that we may keep our sympathies loyal to worthy objects, loyal to what is great and noble in character, loyal to fact. Truth of conviction: so that—so far as in this life is possible—we may give to facts the best homage of our understandings, whether they be the facts of the natural world, or the facts of God's Revelation of Himself in grace. It is when the harmony between conviction and feeling, between feeling and language, is thus established, that the soul is true: that the light of truth beams through its wonderful machinery, and proclaims its substantial harmony with the Will of God. And in this harmony consists the soul's wellbeing—its freedom, its joy, its power: its increasing freedom from sin as that which really fetters its liberty: its joy in that which really

[1] St. John xiv. 15. [2] St. Luke vi. 46.

kindles its deepest enthusiasm: its royal power over itself as well as over circumstances. "The Spirit Itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." May He bestow on us this His priceless gift:—the sense of sonship which comes from the God of Truth to those whose simple aim is to be true.

SERMON VI.

SELF-DENIAL.

St. Matt. xvi. 24.

Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

WHEN men raise objections to Christianity in the present day, they generally say that they cannot believe this or that dogma of the creed. They admit in general terms that the moral teaching of Christianity is very beautiful, but then they cannot accept its doctrines. They admit that the Sermon on the Mount is admirable, but they cannot make up their minds to believe the first fourteen verses of St. John's Gospel, or the truths enunciated in the conversation with Nicodemus, or in the great discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum. And yet, if such objectors were to look a little deeper into the real motives which lead them to reject the Gospel, they would probably find that it is not the doctrine but the moral teaching of the New Testament at which they really stumble. They imagine their difficulties to be affairs of the understanding, whereas in reality they are affairs of the will. The will has a strong and subtle power of controlling the intellect in its own interest. It is, of course, more respectable to except against a dogma on intellectual and literary grounds, than to except against a high and exacting moral precept on the plain ground that you do not wish to have to put it in practice. Therefore, it is quite natural that the objections to Christianity which are com-

monly stated should be objections to its doctrines;—to the literal truth of the Resurrection, or to the Sacrifice offered by our Lord on the Cross, to the majesty and justice of God, or to the grace and power of the Sacraments. But, man being what he is, and especially the middle and upper classes in England at the present time being what they are, it is equally natural that the objections which are felt should be moral ones. And if a large number of persons who so object were to be asked to put their finger upon the passages in the New Testament which, upon a close self-examination, they have found really to predispose them against the Gospel, and which, speaking quite frankly, they would wish to see erased, they would probably select the words which Jesus spoke to His disciples: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." For these words do, beyond all doubt, point to a theory and practice of life which is not in harmony with that which obtains among the wealthier classes of a great commercial country. It is natural to us men to persuade ourselves, if we can, that all which we like at the moment is as it ought to be, and that God's approval goes strictly hand in hand with our personal inclinations. And accordingly a large number of most well-meaning persons in England at the present time have no doubt whatever that voluntary self-denial, such as our Lord here enjoins, belongs to a most mistaken view of duty. And their practice is entirely in harmony with their theory. They are good-natured and benevolent, and, indeed, they cultivate many of the natural and social virtues. But to say that they "deny themselves," and "take up their cross," and "follow Christ," would be to say of them what they would themselves earnestly disclaim. They do nothing of the sort; and they do not admit that anything of the sort is necessary.

There are, among others, three main objections which are felt and urged against the plain scope of this precept of our Lord Jesus Christ. These objections are based on doctrinal, on moral, and on social grounds respectively.

I.

There is, first of all, the doctrinal objection which represents self-denial and mortification as involving a certain dishonour to the redemptive Work of Jesus Christ. Is it not true, men ask, that having been "justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"? Is it not true that Jesus Christ our Lord has done everything for us; that our salvation is simply and altogether His work; that no human merit or agency can share in the saving power of His Blood? And if this be so, is not the practice of mortification and self-denial at least open to some considerable *primâ facie* objections? Does it not favour the idea that there is an incompleteness in the Work of Christ, and that this deficiency has to be supplied by the efforts of Christians? Does it not thus create, or at least go hand in hand with, an anxious, over-scrupulous state of mind, far removed from that tranquil satisfaction which belongs to the sense of an accomplished and accepted Redemption?

Now, here it might be observed that it is our Lord Himself Who especially insists upon the necessity of self-denial, and that it is not to be supposed that His teaching is likely to lead men to misapprehend or undervalue His atoning Work. He insists upon it, not in one or two passages, but in passages so numerous, so intertwined with all that is characteristic in His teaching, that to overlook them would be to change the whole colouring of the Gospel which we hold in our hands. What else does our Lord hint at by such words as the following?—"Woe unto you that are

rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers unto the false prophets."[1] What else does He mean by saying, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"?[2] What else by insisting that he who would save his life—that is, his life of natural and sensual inclinations—shall lose it, while he who would lose his life—that is, mortify the inclinations of his lower self—the same shall save it?[3] What else by His statement that ever since the preaching of John the Baptist the kingdom of heaven had suffered violence, that those who kept no terms with self had taken it by force?[4] What else by His allusions to the strait gate and narrow way, which is found only by the few, and which leadeth unto life?[5] What else by His saying, with respect, indeed, to His own Death and Resurrection, but also with a wider reference: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"?[6]

Do you say that this is not what you mean by the Gospel? All that I can say is that it is the teaching of Jesus Christ. Do you say that the Gospel is not to be found in the Evangelists, but only in St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians? Surely that is a theory which St. Paul himself would not have approved. He certainly would not have said that the Lord of Life Himself taught that which was not consistent with the teaching of His servants. Is it not rather probable that you have misunderstood St. Paul than that St. Paul had departed so widely as some moderns pretend from the teaching of his adored Master?

Surely, my brethren, when St. Paul rules that we are

[1] St. Luke vi. 24-26. [2] St. Matt. v. 4. [3] St. Luke xvii. 33.
[4] St. Matt. xi. 12. [5] *Ib.* vii. 14. [6] St. John xii. 24.

justified by faith in Christ, he does not condemn Christ's own teaching on the subject of self-mortification, as if it belonged to another and hostile system of justification. For when he speaks of justifying faith, he is careful to tell us that he means not a bare, fruitless apprehension, but a "faith which worketh by love."[1] In point of fact, no faith is justifying which does not thus work by love; and the first property of love is implicit obedience. "If ye love Me," says our Lord, "keep My commandments."[2] Love, indeed, cannot receive Christ's righteousness, but it is entirely inseparable from the faith which does so. Faith and love may be separated in our idea, but in the life they are inseparable. It is then one and the same habit of mind which "trusts in Christ Jesus and has no confidence in the flesh,"[3] and which at the same time delights in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in persecutions for Christ's sake.[4] It is one and the same habit of mind which determines to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him Crucified;[5] and which at the same time sets very systematically about the work of crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts.[6]

Indeed, so far is there from being any real antagonism between trust in Christ Crucified on the one side, and an energetic crucifixion of self upon the other, that the duty does in point of fact radiate from the doctrine. Kneeling at the foot of the Cross, the soul perceives the range and force of two lines of truth, each of which is clearly stated in the New Testament, and both of which lead to the practical conclusion before us.

1. Of these, the first is the necessity of conformity between Christ the Head of renewed humanity, and ourselves its members. If He had merely washed away our sins by His precious Blood, leaving us pardoned but

[1] Gal. v. 6. [2] St. John xiv. 15. [3] Phil. iii. 3.
[4] 2 Cor. vi. 4-10. [5] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [6] Gal. v. 24.

unsanctified, this conformity would not exist. The figures which Scripture uses to show that we are very members incorporate of His Body, that we and He form in the Divine Mind one organism,—I had almost dared to say, one creature,—imply that we must perforce be at least like Him. "We are members," says St. Paul, "of His Body, out of His Flesh, and of His Bones."[1] "It will not do," exclaims St. Bernard, "for the body to be tended delicately while the Head is crowned with thorns." And God has predestinated us "to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."[2] "The image of His Son"! It is in truth an image of unspeakable moral majesty; but it is also and pre-eminently an image of suffering. Conformity to Christ rising from the tomb, and ascending beyond the stars, is impossible unless there be also conformity with Christ insulted, scourged, scorned, crucified. We cannot select one side of that Divine life, and eliminate the other. We cannot be like Christ the true Philanthropist, yet not like Christ the Man of Sorrows. "If any man will come after Me"—it is not said, let him be benevolent, active, courteous, genial: these are right and necessary; but—"let him deny himself, and take up his cross." This is the test of a living and perpetuated union with Christ, the voluntary acceptance of suffering for the sake of and in profound sympathy with the Divine Saviour of the world. It is of course possible to lounge throughout life upon an ottoman, and to admire in a heartless æsthetic way the Crucifixion as described by the Evangelists, just as one might admire it as painted by a Guido or a Vandyck. But to do this alone is to have no part with Jesus. Burke says somewhere, when he is insisting upon the relations of the passions to man's physical frame, that it is impossible to feel earnest indig-

[1] Eph. v. 30. [2] Rom. viii. 29.

nation while you are lying back in an easy chair with your mouth open. It is at least not more impossible to do so than to lead a self-indulgent life, and have a real living understanding of and a true spiritual part in Christ Crucified.

2. This is borne out and explained by the other truth which the soul learns at the foot of the Cross. It is, that pain,—which, apart from Revelation, is so dreadful, so unexplained a mystery in the creation of the Good God,—has been blessed and sanctified by the Great Sufferer, and has distinct functions assigned to it in the kingdom of the new creation. Nature shrinks from pain : Grace embraces it and makes the most of it. This could not well be otherwise, if indeed Christians are artists who have their eyes fixed on Christ Crucified and are imitating Him.

And thus self-denial, which is voluntary pain on a small scale, is not merely the expression of penitent and grateful love. It is the knife whereby a true love of Jesus prunes away the proud-flesh of the old unregenerate man, and fashions within him more and more perfectly the Divine Image of the Crucified. It is the appropriation of the sanctifying as distinct from the cleansing virtue of the Cross.

The misery of the Fall consisted, among other things, in this, that it detached man from his true Centre, God, and led him to seek and form a new centre, self. Self is the centre of the unregenerate man, as God is the Centre of the new man created in Christ Jesus. To the one his own thoughts, views, feelings, impulses, passions, are everything. To the other the Divine Mind and Heart and Will revealed in Jesus is the absolute Type of beauty and truth to which he determines, by God's strength, that his own shall be conformed. But this conformity can only be achieved by a stern war waged at all points upon the principle of self. Self is always plotting a revolution,

even in the most holy souls, whereby God might be driven from His Throne, and the reins of power might be seized by a committee of the passions under the presidency of self. And self is not really to be coaxed into loyalty to God; it is profoundly disaffected towards His rule. Self therefore must be repressed; and the repression of self is always painful; it is a taking up the cross. Still, a Christian looks upon the repression of self as his proper business; and Christ by His grace makes it a means of his progressive sanctification. Self-denial, then, is the common-sense of a genuine Christian life, just as self-indulgence is the common-sense of a mere natural or heathen life. The love of God lives in the soul in exactly an inverse ratio to the strength of the natural passions and inclinations: the sanctification of the soul is achieved by, and depends upon, what St. Paul terms a being "crucified with Christ."[1]

And these two truths,—the necessity of a conformity between the Head and the members of renewed humanity, and the achievement of sanctification by pain applied to the repression of self,—are not hostile to the prerogatives of the Redeemer's Cross. They are not in conflict with the truth that He alone pardons us; they are an illustration, an extension, of His complete victory. Self-denial is the natural expression of a love that can never repay its debt of gratitude to a transcendent charity. It is an expression of the conviction that Christ died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto self, but should by the repression of self be made like to Jesus Christ.

II.

But if it be granted that self-denial cannot be rightly objected to on the theological ground of any supposed

[1] Gal. ii. 20.

antagonism to the work of Jesus Christ, can it be excepted against on moral grounds? There is a doctrine abroad, which I can only describe as the theory of a healthy animalism. Leaving Revelation out of sight, or sitting very loosely to its teaching, this theory maintains that all the senses and faculties with which man is endowed were given him to be made the most of by the largest possible exercise or indulgence. It sees only a lack of manly vigour in any hesitation to give self, in all possible ways, full swing. It asks, with a stout sense of having nature on its side, what sort of characters your self-denying men are likely to be. It answers its own question by saying that they must be soft, feeble, scrupulous, semi-feminine, morbid, fidgety, finicking characters; that they must go through life with mincing words and hesitating gait; that they must lack force, decision, directness, fire,—all that makes man manly and strong, all that enables him to take his place at the head of God's visible creation, and to play his part with effect among his fellows.

1. Now, upon this theory of life, let it be observed, first of all, that the argument from final causes on which it rests requires at least, even on natural grounds, some limitation. It is indeed true that if God gives a faculty, He means it, generally speaking, to be used. But in no case does He mean it to be used immoderately; and self-restraint, if not self-denial, must come in to determine the point at which its use is to be suspended. When we are told, by high medical authorities, that in order to preserve a perfectly healthy state of body we ought to leave off every meal with a certain amount of appetite, it is clear that there must be a certain exercise of self-denial, whenever we take food, in order to do perfect justice to our animal frame. And there are other and lower animal instincts with which we have been endowed by the Creator, which cannot be indulged beyond a certain point without in-

volving us in extreme physical suffering, while yet to restrain their indulgence at that point often involves a moral effort of the severest character. It is clear then that a certain self-denial is the true law of nature; that it limits each species of natural indulgence; that it cannot be ignored without risk of extreme physical disaster. Nor is this all. It may be that, at the bidding of a higher law, the exercise of a natural faculty or taste may have to be entirely suspended. Take the case of a man whose muscular system is in full force, but who knows that he has heart-disease, and that if he attempts to run up-stairs with the bounding step which would be natural to him, the effort may cost him his life. There the self-asserting instinct of one portion of the animal man is kept in check by the prudential demands of another; and it would be easy to multiply illustrations to the same effect. Our nature itself does not countenance the doctrine that, if God gives opportunities and capacities for enjoyment, He always means those opportunities to be made the very most of under all circumstances and unrestrainedly.

2. Now the self-denial enjoined by Jesus Christ is at once a support and completion of these prudential limits to indulgence which are prescribed by Nature. It is true indeed that the Gospel goes further than Nature in its prescriptions, as having a higher, that is a moral, as distinct from a physical end in view. Nature says: Eat always with moderation. The Gospel says: Fast; or at least use such abstinence that the flesh being subdued to the spirit, you may ever obey the godly motions of Christ within you. Nature says: Seven hours of sleep is enough for any man. The Gospel says: Could ye not watch with Me one hour beyond or before your daily work? "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."[1] Nature says: The in-

[1] St. Matt. xxvi. 41.

dulgence of sensual passion beyond a certain point will infallibly destroy bodily health, and probably mental power as well. The Gospel takes higher ground, in insisting upon strict chastity. It even hints at the blessedness of a single life for Christ's sake, when St. Paul exclaims: "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things of the world, how he may please his wife";[1] or again, when St. John cries in rapture at the vision of the hundred and forty and four thousand on Mount Sion ranged around the spotless Lamb: "These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."[2]

3. In these and kindred ways the Gospel confirms and extends the guidance of nature, that we are not meant to indulge natural propensities to the full, and that under certain circumstances it is good to check them. But the question remains, whether this restraint which we put upon them does really enfeeble and unman the character. Is a man less manly because he keeps his appetites well at bay, because he eats sparingly and of simple fare, because with masterful decision he crucifies the flesh, with the affections and lusts?

In order to answer this question we have to consider what it is which self-denial really involves. When we desire to eat a particular food which will cost more than we can afford, what is it that we really mortify and check? Is it simply the animal propension to eat that particular food? I trow not. Behind the propension, if I may so speak, and inseparable from it, there is the whole fabric of the will. The craving of this particular propension is only a form of the ceaseless craving of self to make all minister to self. The defeat and disappoint-

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 32, 33. [2] Rev. xiv. 4.

ment of the animal instinct craving for the food is the defeat and disappointment of the selfish principle resident in the will. It is the will defeating, controlling itself; it is the will submitting to defeat, but at its own hands; it is the will achieving its noblest victory.

This simple moral truth requires insisting on. There are millions who can see in voluntary obedience nothing more than moral weakness. They regard an act of obedience, whether to a master or to a precept, only in the light of a smaller force acknowledging the might and tyranny of a greater force. But this mechanical view of obedience is not applicable to the Christian virtue which bears that name. Christian obedience is essentially voluntary: God Himself leaves the will free. And being voluntary it is an act not of weakness but of power,—of power exercised by self over self. And when such obedience involves that which is extremely unwelcome to self, namely, pain, this act of power is very great indeed, and instead of diminishing, it enormously increases the volume of moral force in the will. It enhances the directness and intensity of the will's action. It is true that if I wish to eat a particular forbidden food, it is the raw material of my will (so to speak), namely desire, that wants to eat it. If I mortify that desire I do conquer, repress, weaken self. Still it is I, my higher self, which conquers me, my lower self. The apparent defeat of the particular instinct is a real victory for the will as a whole. It is an assertion of the will's power of self-determination. Such a victory means that my moral life is not a collection of animal instincts which move on like brute beasts by necessary impulse or attraction towards their several objects; but, on the contrary, that my will is a monarch who is in masterful possession of all his subject-faculties, and who can gratify or restrain their exercise at pleasure. And therefore it is that self-denial as a matter of fact

augments moral power instead of lessening it. The man who can control his propensities is more of a man,—a *vir*, —has in him more force and virtue, than the reasoning animal who yet wanders helplessly after each object that solicits his sense. And the sterner and more exhaustive the self-denial the greater is the intensification of moral force. The greater the compression, the greater is the concentration of compressed force;—the greater the power of expanding at pleasure that which he has most freely repressed.

Ah! brethren, little do they know of the real laws of life who represent Christian self-denial as the antagonist to manliness. Rather the really manly, the men who have enriched and beautified the stock of human moral force, are the men who have by long years of self-discipline nerved their wills for the supreme moments of decisive action. History is but a long catalogue of illustrations of this truth. And Christian history illustrates it by pointing to the ancient martyrology. Who were the martyrs of the early ages? They were, generally speaking, poor and weak men and women, often slaves, who had no earthly patrons to gratify, no historic name to illustrate, no ambition to indulge, no thought of what men call a place in history. At the call of duty and for the honour of an unseen Saviour they have surrendered that which is dearest to man with simple unostentatious courage. With such, a life of self-denial had been generally a long preparation for the last agony; and this act by which they accepted death was but the last term of a self-discipline, each act of which had continuously been adding to their moral power. "This," said one of them on mounting the scaffold, "is what I have ever been waiting for." Believe it, dear brethren, that if you would have a really feeble will, there is nothing like self-indulgence; you may indulge self to a point at which any restraint becomes impossible, and at which the will is

practically extinct. Believe it, that if you would have a strong will, royally controlling and animating the whole soul, there is nothing like self-denial: you may by constant mortification of self create a moral force which will flinch before no obstacles, and which will make your manhood divinely strong. And it was because Jesus Christ came to raise us from the prostration produced by the centuries of self-indulgence, and to invest us with something of His own moral glory, that He said to His disciples, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

III.

But here is a third, and, as some will think, a more formidable objection to self-denial as enjoined by the Gospel. "After all," it is said, "man is a social animal: he is not an isolated individual charged with no duty besides that of giving the greatest possible amount of elasticity and strength to the machinery of his own moral being. He has duties to those around him, and the question is whether for their sakes he can afford to be self-denying. What would be the effect upon society if everybody was to be seized with the enthusiasm of self-denial? Surely society would go to pieces, if its several members were to be thus enamoured of the spirit of ascetics and martyrs; and the fact that the asceticism recommended in the Gospel would, if generally adopted, be thus anti-social, is its sufficient condemnation."

Here we may remark, first of all, that in all parts of the world, and in England especially, there is a large multitude of persons who are not called upon to add to the existing physical hardships of their lot. Not indeed that the poor are debarred from the privilege, the elevating moral and spiritual effects, of self-denial. There are many small mortifications of self-will which are possible to

every human life, and which when freely accepted cannot but enrich and ennoble it. But the large systematic war upon animal self-indulgence which does no more than restore moral elasticity in the well-to-do classes of society, is not needed where life is a hard daily struggle, where food, clothing, rent, and each addition to a family, are matters of anxious thought; where the father's scanty fare scarcely avails to support the strain of unintermitted physical toil upon which his family depends for bread; where God has surrounded life with hardship, and where man has only to accept God's appointments with cheerful alacrity in order to be almost sanctified forthwith.

And as the poor are not called upon to increase the hardships of life by that voluntary mortification of the animal love of comfort which is so necessary elsewhere, so it is certain that a large percentage of the well-to-do classes will always decline to listen to a call which they might obey with advantage. God has made and He leaves us free agents; He puts force upon us neither by His grace nor by His precepts; and the result is that in all departments of conduct a large proportion of His creatures abuse their freedom by neglecting His behests. The motives which make self-denial unpopular are sufficiently numerous and strong; and neither in this nor in any generation of the world's history is there any great risk of a large section of the well-to-do classes leading self-denying lives. But if, practically speaking, the mass of society is not likely to be seized with an enthusiasm for taking up the Cross, yet it may be replied that God gives His commands on the supposition that they will be obeyed, and that their excellence must be tested by a state of society in which everybody obeys them. If this should be granted, what, let me ask, would be the harm to society if every one, rich and poor alike, should become self-denying?

You say that the luxury and self-indulgence of the wealthy provides labour for the poor, that an ascetic aristocracy would stop the looms of our manufactories and throw our masons out of work, and impoverish the millions who live by ministering to the ease and tastes and fashions of the few. You deprecate a moral doctrine which threatens the paralysis of modern industry. Luxury, you hold, may seem haughty and selfish, as she advances with her giant strides to consume the vast fortunes which have been heaped up by patient toil or suddenly won by successful hazard. But she is, you maintain, the real charity of the modern world, because she really creates the demand for labour. As she passes in triumph along all the summits of our material civilisation, she awards her blessings not merely to her favoured votaries, but to distant multitudes who in their ignorance gaze upon her suspiciously as upon an unfeeling stranger that has no smiles except for wealth and station. It will never do, you protest, to make these crude prejudices the rule of action. It will never do, you say, to drive luxury from our borders; since, if her departure might serve to repress a few excesses, it would reduce society to an equal level of penurious wretchedness.

Certainly, my brethren, if this doctrine were true, Dives in the parable has been cruelly misrepresented. If Lazarus lay at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table, yet Lazarus, at least, might have remembered that the purple and fine linen which Dives wore, and the sumptuous fare upon which he was daily regaled, were in reality the form assumed by the far-sighted consideration and charity of Dives for the suffering classes. If at the bar of Christ our Lord, Dives be adjudged to the eternal flames, yet at the bar of this political economy he deserves something like an ovation. Such at least would be the conclusion

of the doctrine which identifies the advance of luxury with the real wellbeing of the poor, and which attacks Christianity for undervaluing her services.

And yet, my brethren, is it certain that industry is thus dependent upon the enervation and demoralisation of a large class to which it ministers? Would human labour cease, would its total amount be lessened, would anything really happen, except the giving it a new direction, if the wealthy classes of a Christian country should not spend their substance upon the trinkets and dainties which they personally prize, but, living in simplicity themselves, should make the bulk of their yearly outlay on public works of religion and charity, designed to promote God's glory and the interests of the many? There might still be, methinks, in such a state of things the same market for art, for skill, for all that is beautiful and costly; but its destination would be different. There might still be the same visible triumphs of human genius and perseverance, but their enjoyment would be more general; labour would not merely be paid in coin, it would share in the general right to enjoy its own productions. This may be deemed utopian by those who take it for granted that all that is in human society is all that can be; but surely it is a libel on the All-wise Creator of society to maintain that the majority of human beings at one of its extremities can only be supported by a system which enervates and demoralises the few at the other. Moreover, the sources of capital are not really unlimited; and when a large part of the actual results of labour are drained off by luxury for the benefit of the few, they are withdrawn from the service of the many.

And, indeed, those who steadily consider the actual condition of society in England might well hail Christian self-denial as a friend which may save it from dangers which are not altogether visionary or remote. We see

before our eyes, on the one hand, accumulations of property in single hands greater than any that have been witnessed in previous generations, and as a consequence an outburst of luxury which alarms thoughtful men who do not take a religious estimate of the fact. On the other hand, we see a mass of unmanageable poverty,—a proletarian class increasing steadily year by year, and year by year distancing more alarmingly the efforts which have as yet been made to relieve it. And within the last twelve months we have witnessed a transfer of political power from the hands of the well-to-do classes to the hands of the many.[1] How will that power, when once it has been firmly grasped, be used? If self-interest be really the only motive that rules the actions of men, it is obvious that the many will at least desire to appropriate somehow the possessions of the few. And whatever form this appropriation will take, it will be in truth an attack upon the right of property,—that sacred right which is a chief foundation of society, and which cannot even be obscured without delivering over all that is precious and sacred in the outward relations among men to the chaos of their conflicting passions. For think not that a revolution which should assail the millionaires of society will suffer the smaller fortunes which just command comfort and luxury to pass untouched. In the eyes of such a revolution, property of itself is theft; it is a crime against humanity, and as a crime it is punished by a confiscation which takes no account of its past services, or of the titles on which it rests, or of the moderation of its dimensions. Nay, when its holders have been impoverished they are still held guilty on the score of the past, and are probably punished with a vindictiveness which will not allow itself to reflect that after all they have not done more than accept a traditional position.

[1] This sermon was preached in the year 1868.

Ah! there are fierce murmurs which may now and then be heard rising to the surface from the deep under-current of feeling and opinion, which tell us that the catastrophe which is always possible for a selfish society may not be so distant from ourselves. And if it is to be averted, this must not be by any well-calculated contrivance whereby one selfishness sometimes seeks to buy acquiescence or silence at the hands of another selfishness, more powerful but less comfortable than itself. These compromises between weakness and power are hollow insincerities, and they leave the spirit of attack and destruction in its full force. One power only can save society—the spirit of Christian self-denial lavishly poured forth from the throne of Christ both upon the wealthy and upon the poor. That spirit might inspire wealth to anticipate and exceed the demands of poverty; it might inspire poverty to view wealth as being simply responsibility lodged in the hand of a friend, whose burdens not less than his benevolence called for gratitude and respect. It might mediate, as could no other influence, between classes which selfishness must estrange more and more fatally from each other; and in the end it might save a civilisation which it is accused of undermining. Would that over the door of every workhouse, every mechanics' institute, every club, every palace in this country, could be inscribed the words, —in which a wise Liberalism and a wise Conservatism might find a common formula,—"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'

IV.

Brethren, if, speaking in the name of that disinterested Love Which was nailed to a cross for your salvation, I could permit myself to use an appeal to your self-interest, I would say to you, representatives of the propertied

classes whom I see around me: Deny yourselves for your own sakes; for the sake of your class show that you comprehend the responsibilities of property if you would continue to enjoy it. But I dare not speak only or chiefly thus. You have reasons for self-denial which are truer, stronger, deeper than any which bear upon your outward condition in this passing world.

As moral beings you cannot attain that strength and pliancy of will which is the perfection of human character unless you have the courage to be sincerely self-denying, —to inflict some real violence upon your natural inclinations, to nail your passions to a cross. As men redeemed by Jesus Crucified, you cannot be like your Lord if you go softly through life, crowned not with thorns but with roses, bearing in your hands all that makes life a pleasant dream, such as Pagan poets loved to picture it, and knowing nothing of the moral illumination which they share who freely choose to carry the Cross of Christ. When life is cushioned and carpeted with the refinements of civilisation, it is not possible to follow Christ without some determined effort, some plan and method of action, which confronts self in the details of action, and takes up the cross in the midst of ordinary social duties.

There are many ways in which self can be denied and the cross taken up. There is natural curiosity—not, I mean, the desire to acquire useful or necessary knowledge —but the mere love of current gossip, which is sometimes allied to sins against purity and charity. Mortify that. There is the impulse to say everything that comes into one's head, be it good or bad,—to tell a good story which may not be perfectly true, but which is sure to be popular, and popular, it may be, in exact proportion to its departure from strict truth. Check that impulse. There is the antipathy which rises against those who are thought, whether justly or not, to have done us an ill turn, or

whose characters we dislike; and there is the chilliness, or haughtiness, or curtness of manner which expresses it. Crush that feeling, transfigure that manner by one earnest prayer. There is the temptation, which is almost a creation of our day, to lose priceless time in floundering about in the mass of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly periodicals, instead of bracing the mind by severer studies, by the hard acquisition of solid knowledge, by the close investigation of truth. Literature is a vast field, in which at almost every step it is possible to deny self and take up the cross. And there is the whole question of needful recreations. Here too, without forfeiting the object of relaxation, self may be denied, the tastes of others may be consulted and preferred, and especially that great but most needful mortification of self may be practised, never to talk about self, whether in the way of praise, or excuse, or depreciation; but as if self did not exist, and when it costs a great effort to do so, to throw thought and feeling and interest into the sympathies of those around us.

These acts of self-denial, and others of like nature, will run side by side with those duties which our Lord prescribed, and which give form and force to His precept: —I mean prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. No Christian is true to the teaching of Jesus Christ who neglects these duties. No Christian is true to that teaching who does not endeavour to pray, to fast, and to give alms, when it costs him something to do so. Above all, the more these and all other works done for Jesus Christ can be unostentatious, the more will they embody the Spirit of Christ and enable us in very deed to follow Him.

Ay, let us freely choose, now while we may, to do so. It is possible to follow Him in an external official spirit as a beadle who is paid for carrying a mace. It is possible to follow Him with limping step, and many falls, yet in sincerity, and with a broken heart. It is possible, such is

His transforming grace, to follow Him with the strength of a consistent heroism, drawn onward and upwards towards His Cross and His Throne by the attraction of an unconquerable Love. If not the last, at least may the second be our portion and our sincere endeavour.

It is by many little acts of self-denial, faithfully performed, that the will is disciplined for those sublimer sacrifices which are on earth as a flash of moral light from Heaven, and which take captive by their magnificence the hearts and the imaginations of men. Who shall say what God might not do for our Church, for our country, ay, for Christendom, if among you who hear me some at least could resolve this night, by the grace of Christ, to be Christians, not in feelings merely, or on paper, or in outward guise, but in very deed and power,—ay, to follow Christ first to the cross, and then to glory? You must freely choose to do so; this excellence is not a vegetable that grows of itself. You must have loved self, and then deny it; you must have weighed the bulk and felt the sharp edges of the cross, and then freely and cheerfully have laid it on your shoulders. But this is the core and marrow of practical Christianity,—it is the true force of sanctity, it is the very throbbing pulse of the Church's heart. Philosophers may dissect an idea, and poets may give shape and play to a feeling, but to suffer freely for Christ, and with Christ, is to taste of the hidden manna, and to be already on the very steps of the Throne of Heaven.

SERMON VII.

THE CURSE ON THE FIG-TREE.

ST. MATT. xxi. 19.

And when He saw a fig-tree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and He said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away.

THE incident thus described in the second lesson for this afternoon [1] occurred on the Monday before the Crucifixion, or, as we should say, on Monday in Holy Week. After His solemn entrance into Jerusalem on the previous day, our Lord had in the evening retired to spend the night at Bethany; and He was returning to Jerusalem in the early morning to continue the solemn work on which He had entered. There was a fig-tree near the road, covered, before its time, with leaves. Our Lord went up to it, says St. Mark, "if haply He might find some fruit on it," and "He found nothing thereon, but leaves only."

Upon this He pronounced a curse upon the tree: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." That Monday night, when our Lord and the Apostles passed the tree on their road back to Bethany, it was already dark; but as they were walking into Jerusalem again on the Tuesday morning—twenty-four hours after the occurrence—"the disciples saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots."

Let us try to consider, first, the character of our Lord's act on this occasion, and then its meaning.

[1] *i.e.* August the 8th.

I.

1. We have then before us, first of all, and conspicuously, an act of superhuman power, an act by which Jesus Christ illustrated His empire over the natural and inanimate world. About seven of His recorded miracles are of this description. When, for instance, He changed the water into wine at Cana of Galilee, or fed the five and the four thousand with bread that was miraculously provided, He showed that He could create at will that which did not exist before in the world of nature and of sense. And when He stilled a tempest by His word, and walked upon the sea, and bade an Apostle find the shekel that was needed for the tribute in the mouth of a fish which had yet to be taken, and when, after the skill and perseverance of the fishermen had failed, He procured a miraculous draught of fishes, He showed how He could at will set aside the conditions and laws of Nature in a fashion which only befitted Nature's Lord. None of these miracles admit of the kind of explanation which has been suggested in recent times with respect to our Lord's miracles of healing. Of these there are seventeen instances recorded in the Gospels; and some few of them might, it is supposed, be the result of a sympathetic imagination, or of some occult magnetic faculty in the Worker, the exact nature and efficacy of which has yet to be ascertained by physical science. Christian faith is not, so far as can be foreseen, much concerned to follow these speculations with any anxiety. If it should be eventually shown that some of the acts of healing which Christians have been accustomed to consider miraculous can be explained by natural causes, the existence and operation of which had not previously been understood, this discovery will not affect the true import of the acts in question, while it certainly cannot be extended to those miracles in which

our Lord displayed His power over the natural and inanimate world. Take the case before us. It is not hinted in any quarter that the movement of a human will, expressed in words, but not taking shape in external action, could possibly affect the life or wellbeing of a vegetable; or, that there is any quality or force in man, or any sympathetic response in the vegetable which could bring about any such result. There are histories of cures of disease said to have been helped forward, if not achieved, by the presence of a remarkable person acting powerfully on the sympathies or commanding the confidence of a patient. This may perhaps explain some of the reports of cures after touching for the king's-evil, which was a not uncommon practice in the time of the Stuarts: and it may account for effects said to have been produced in certain cases of illness by the appearance of some person of great ascendancy of character at the bedside of a patient in a hospital. But if the best man in London were to take it into his head this evening to utter a curse against the trees on the Thames Embankment, we know perfectly well that, so far from withering away, they would look as green and vigorous to-morrow morning as they do to-day. Between man's mere will and the secret life of a plant there is an impassable chasm: we may, by the labour of our hands, foster the plant's life, or we may cut it short, but its secret is beyond us.

The secret of the fig-tree on the Bethany road was patent to our Lord, and altogether in His power. He did not touch the tree; He uttered a word which expressed the decision of His will; and the tree obeyed. Here, plainly, He was putting forth a faculty with which we, His creatures, have nothing in common: He was proving Himself to be not less the Lord of nature than the Lord of men.

2. Secondly, we have here an act of a purely destructive

character. Our Lord uttered His word; and the fig-tree withered away. There is no other act in our Lord's earthly life which is exactly like this; this act is in sharp and undeniable contrast to the general character of what He did. The only occurrence that can be compared with it is the destruction of the Gadarene swine in the lake of Gennesaret. But the cases do not really correspond. The withering of the fig-tree was a direct result of our Lord's words: He spake, and it was done. The destruction of the swine was an indirect effect of His curing the demoniac: it was an act of the evil spirits whom He expelled from their human victim, and who, with His permission, took possession of the swine. Doubtless He must have foreseen the result; and so far the cases are similar. In both of them the wellbeing of the lower creatures, whether animal or tree, is sacrificed to the moral and spiritual good of man.

When, then, men have complained that this miracle involved a sacrifice of life they are right as to the fact. It did involve the destruction of a living tree. The natural law that the lower creatures were given for the benefit of man was not repealed by our Lord; He did not make it sinful to eat either animal or vegetable food. Every meal that we take presupposes the destruction of life—whether it be animal or vegetable life; and those persons who have scruples about the destruction of animal life for the purposes of human food, have no scruples, it seems, about destroying vegetable life for such purposes—that is, the particular kind of life which was destroyed when our Lord cursed the fig-tree. The question is whether, if it be consistent with the will of the Creator that lower forms of life should be destroyed in order to support man's animal frame, it is not at least equally consistent with His will that such destruction should take place, if necessary, in order to advance the highest life of man, the life of his spirit.

It was for such a reason as this that the swine and the fig-tree alike perished. Nature fulfils its highest purposes when it ministers, whether in the triumph of life or of death, to the true progress of a spiritual being like man.

A somewhat similar reply must be made to the frivolous criticism, that in blasting the fig-tree our Lord was invading the rights of property. We know that there were keepers of the Gadarene swine: we do not know that the fig-tree on the Bethany road belonged to any private owner. But, however this may be, our Lord had rights over it which superseded all others, and in virtue of which He acted. The owner of the fig-tree, if it had an owner, was only His tenant-at-will; and while He might at will have destroyed it by the lightning or the wind, He reserved it for a nobler fate; it was, by its destruction, to teach a lesson of truth to the subjects of His spiritual kingdom —a lesson which was to last for all time.

In point of fact, our Lord's mission was to save the souls of men. He aimed simply at the fulfilment of this mission; and He acted in the visible sphere of sense and time, just as God acts in providence and in history. No one thinks God guilty of caprice or injustice when human possessions or very many lives are destroyed by the action of natural forces, which in the long-run, and upon the whole, work out some results of vast beneficence; the particular loss is felt to be justified by the comprehensive wisdom of the general plan. And our Lord's mission to mankind, as Teacher and Redeemer, carried out a plan of this description, which made incidental injury to some of the lower creatures and the suspension of private interests, necessary, and therefore justifiable.

3. Thirdly, and especially, the act before us is a symbolical act: it means something beyond itself, of which it is the symbol. Such acts were common in ancient Israel; they were, in fact, part of the current language of the East.

In this case our Lord acted a parable instead of speaking it. We may reverently suppose that He might have said, 'A certain man beheld a fig-tree in the way, with leaves upon it; and he came to it, if haply he might find fruit thereon. And when he found no fruit thereon, but only leaves, he said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away.' But instead of saying this, He expressed it in action. He saw an actual fig-tree, with leaves; He went to it, and noted that it had no fruit; and then He spoke; and at His word the fig-tree withered from the root.

Action of this kind is of itself more vivid, and more likely to command attention and to fix itself in memory than language; we may be very sure that the disciples did not take their eyes off our Lord while He was thus engaged. His action was the more remarkable because He brought His miraculous power over nature into play, in order thus to illustrate the parable which He was acting, and to impress it more deeply on the minds of those who witnessed it than it would have been impressed by words. Bearing this in mind, we may see our way to answering some further questions which have been asked about this subject.

How, it has been said, could our Lord have expected to find figs upon the tree, such as would satisfy hunger, in the month of March? The answer is, that He did not expect it. As St. Augustine says, with reference to this matter, the Creator was not ignorant of a fact which was well known to the peasants. St. Mark is careful to note that "the time of figs was not yet." But our Lord saw before him a tree which exactly answered His immediate purpose as a Teacher of spiritual truth. As a rule, the fruit of the fig-tree is seen before or together with the leaf; but here was a tree which—perhaps owing to it being in a sunny

situation—was covered prematurely with leaf. Before our Lord went to the tree He knew the real state of the case; but He went, as if in quest of fruit, because His search for fruit was just as much a part of the lesson He had to teach as the condition of the tree itself. And if it should be said that this explanation would attribute to our Lord's action something less than that absolute sincerity which we find elsewhere,—as though He were feigning an expectation which He did not really entertain, —the answer is that He was perfectly sincere, unless indeed symbols, whether in speech or action, can never be employed sincerely. But language is sincere when the exact meaning which the speaker intends to convey is apprehended by those who listen to him. And action is sincere when the idea which the agent intends to express is understood by those who witness it. The disciples, who lived in the very atmosphere of symbol, whether acted or spoken, would never have been embarrassed by the prosaic difficulty of the modern critic; they would have no more questioned the perfect sincerity of their Master than the adequacy of His knowledge when He came to the fig-tree seeking fruit thereon.

In like manner it has been asked whether the stern sentence on the fig-tree does not betray an irritation—the irritation of disappointment? Whether it does not resemble some actions which are attributed to Eastern monarchs, or to children, who have vented their vexation, when something has crossed their wills, on a dumb animal or an inanimate object? Whether this is not unworthy of the calm, lofty, judicial temper of the Ideal Man Who, in small things as in great, was to shed the light of a faultless example upon human conduct?

The answer is, as just now, that our Lord, in blasting the tree, is still acting symbolically. If it could be conceived that He really wanted the literal figs to satisfy His

hunger, and for no other object, and that He was at once surprised and vexed when He did not find them, there would be some reason in what is urged as to His treatment of the unfruitful tree. We should have to confess at least this much, that it was at variance with everything else that we know of His life and character. But if the tree is a symbol of a nation or a man that makes great pretensions, and yet altogether fails to satisfy the just requirements of the Moral Governor of the world, there is no uncontrolled irritability—there is in truth an awful and judicial calmness in its doom. When our Lord drove the buyers and sellers from the temple, He was exerting a righteous anger against those who profaned His Father's house; but it was an anger far too lofty to be confused with irritation. And the danger of such confusion is here even more remote, when He is expressing through a symbolic action, or series of actions, one of the high moral laws by which the All-holy governs, from age to age, our human world.

II.

Yes, our Lord's action is throughout symbolical. What is the meaning, the practical meaning, which lurks beneath, behind the symbol?

1. We cannot mistake the reference, first of all, to the Israel of our Lord's day; Israel here, as often in His parables, is in the foreground of His thought. Beyond all doubt, in the first place, for Him and for His disciples the fig-tree was Israel. In the Psalter and in Isaiah[1] Israel is the vine trained and favoured by the Divine Husbandman; but when Hosea and Joel are uttering the language of judgment, Israel is the fig-tree. Hosea compares the pious Israelites of an earlier time to "the first ripe in the fig-tree";[2] Joel describes the ruined nation of

[1] Ps. lxxx.; Isa. v. 1 *sqq.*

[2] Hosea ix. 10.

later days as a barked fig-tree, which the "enemy has made clean bare, and cast it away, and the branches thereof are made white."[1] Thus, in the old imagery of the prophets, the fig-tree was generally associated with rebuke and judgment, as the vine with favour and mercy; and our Lord took up this settled use of symbolic language, and applied it to the circumstances of His own time. In a parable which the disciples could not have forgotten, He had used this figure to warn Israel while the hour of judgment was yet delayed: "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard: and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he, answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."[2] Here none could mistake the reference. Israel was the unfruitful fig-tree; Israel's God was the Owner of the fig-tree, and of the vineyard in which it was planted; and the Dresser of the tree, Who intercedes thus tenderly for a suspense of judgment, was none other than He Who came, in the first instance, and before all else, to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."[3] But time had passed since that parable was uttered, and the moral scene had changed. The Dresser of the vineyard had been hard at His work of mercy and instruction, but the fig-tree was as it had been before. Nay, there was a feature about it which made a slight alteration in the symbol necessary. The fig-tree which our Lord chose for His purpose on the road to Bethany had leaves, but no fruit. The point of the symbol lies even less in the absence of fruit than in the abundance of the leaves. This fig-tree was an apt figure

[1] Joel i. 7. [2] St. Luke xiii. 6-9. [3] St. Matt. xv. 24.

of the pretentiousness, the self-satisfaction, the boastfulness of Israel. Israel had leaves enough: the boast in the Law, in the temple, in the appointed worship, the ancient ceremonies, the great doctors and schools of legal learning, the mechanical and formal piety. But fruit Israel had not: true contrition for sin, true love of God, simple faith in His promises, inward holiness as distinct from outward religious propriety. These fruits of grace—fruits of that deep change in human nature which was to be brought about by contact with the Incarnate Son, through Christian faith in Him, and Christian Sacraments conveying His life,—Israel had not any more than the heathen peoples. But Israel's guilt lay less in its shortcomings than in its pretensions; the time of the perfect fruits of the Incarnation was not yet, but this Israel would not own. Israel was the fig-tree that would disguise its unfruitfulness by a mass of leaves.

We cannot but recall St. Paul's great appeal: "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law." [1]

So much for the leaves, but what of the fruit?—"Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" [2]

Such, too, was the Israel with which our Lord was in

[1] Rom. ii. 17-20. [2] *Ib.* 21-23.

conflict throughout His ministry. He hungered for some fruit on that ancient fig-tree and found none, but He found leaves in premature and ostentatious abundance. And now the end was coming, and what took place on the Bethany road was an acted parable that shadowed it forth. When Israel shed the blood of the Just One, the curse, self-invoked, lighted upon the race;—it withered spiritually away. The words were fulfilled, "His blood be on us, and on our children."[1] That ancient and glorious stock on which patriarchs and prophets, saints and heroes, had grown for many a century, and whose crowning distinction it was that "of it, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever,"[2]—that honoured tree was smitten forthwith with a Divine blast that dried up all the juices of life, and left it a withered trunk, preserving only the outward forms of its former self. "Forthwith the fig-tree withered away."

2. But Israel is not the only subject of the parable; our Lord's words do not thus pass away; they are spoken for all time. Behind Israel we see nations, institutions, churches, causes, which promise more than they yield, which attract by their leafage, but which bear no fruit. We have not far to go for illustrations. When a civilisation is constantly boasting of its material progress, of its social improvements, of its adequate provisions for the earthly happiness of man, while it is honeycombed with moral sores, at which its eulogists dare not even hint; when an institution or a cause trusts rather to its advertisements than to its solid work; when a Church is more active on platforms and in the press than in striving to promote the Christian faith and life in the souls of her people individually—we have before us the fig-tree on the road to Bethany, and the end cannot be far. And behind institutions are separate souls,

[1] St. Matt. xxvii. 25. [2] Rom. ix. 5.

which make them up, and apart from which they are airy abstractions. You and I, my brethren, may see in this acted parable a solemn word addressed to ourselves.

(*a*) Now, as of old, Jesus our Lord hungers for spiritual fruit. As He thirsted for our salvation on the Cross, so He desires, with an eagerness which we best express in the language of sense, something to show that there has been a true work of God in the soul,—the fruits of the indwelling Spirit: "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance." This surely is a most invigorating, and withal awful consideration,—that there is a Being, Whom we do not see, Whose Eye is ever upon us, and Who knows all about us, and Who desires earnestly and constantly that each one of our lives should be productive.

(*b*) He comes to us,—sooner or later, to each of us,—as He came to the leafy and fruitless fig-tree on the road to Bethany. Others, even those who know us best, cannot come so near to us as He does. Others see appearances, and do not penetrate to realities; they see a respectable or religious bearing, regular and pious habits, works which are, at least in their form and effect, good works. But He sees beyond these leaves, deeper and clearly, into the very centre of the soul. What is the fruit which He would find there now,—which He will find at the hour of our death? Will He find a living faith, a strong hope, a warm love of God and of man, a true repentance for all past sins, a desire to do God's will, simply and purely, and to let human judgments take care of themselves?

What would He find? Would He find only an interest in religious questions of the day, a taste for church music or church architecture, an aptitude for controversy, a devotion to the literary aspects of Scripture, its history,

its antiquities, its poetry, its language,—phrases, practices, habits, which friends and usage and associations prescribe —but nothing deeper, nothing internal to and inseparable from the soul, nothing that He would deem fruits, and not mere leaves? The soul which is withered before the Face of Christ, at the particular judgment which follows on death, withers for ever. Let us think of this earnestly and often. Let us be looking out for the visit which will sooner or later be paid; that when He comes to us He may find, through His own transforming grace, the realities and not the mere semblance of a life of service; —not merely leaves, but fruit.

SERMON VIII.

FINAL PERSEVERANCE.

St. Matt. xxiv. 13.

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

THROUGHOUT the passage which has just been read as the second lesson, it is often difficult to say whether our Lord is speaking of the fate of Jerusalem or of the end of the world. The first event was to be a kind of rehearsal, on a small scale, of the second: and thus, much of what our Lord said would be applicable, in different degrees, to both. As the earthly Jerusalem would be compassed by the army of Titus, and burned with fire, so the earth and all things that are in it would one day, through whatever immediate agency, be burned up too. In either case the unreflecting many would remain in the city of destruction, and share its doom; in either case, those who noted with awe and expectation the instructive movements of God's providence, would have fled for safety to the appointed refuge. "When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth," adds the Evangelist, "let him understand;)"—in other words, this means more than may appear at first sight;—"then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains: and let him which is on the house-top not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days." Is our Lord advising what to do

when the earthly Jerusalem is visibly doomed? Undoubtedly: yet His words point also to the greater event beyond. In both cases the catastrophe is preceded by a parade of religious, or rather irreligious, delusions—"false Christs." In both cases it is heralded by physical as well as by political troubles. In both cases, the faithful servants of God are exposed to persecutions, before the end arrives; and it is in view of this complication of anxieties that our Lord says, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

The importance of perseverance in God's service is a point which occupies a leading place in our Lord's teaching. We know from St. Matthew that He used these very words—"He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved"—on an earlier and different occasion, in His address to the twelve Apostles on sending them out to their work.[1] In the same way He rewarded their perseverance up to a certain point by an especial promise: "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me."[2] In like manner He warns that "no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God";[3] and depicts the pitiable case of him who "began to build, but was not able to finish."[4] To the same purpose are His parting precepts to His Apostles: "Continue ye in My love"; "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love";[5] and His references to His own life of obedience: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work," and in His Intercessory Prayer, "I have finished the work that Thou gavest me to do"; and His sixth word on the cross, "It is finished."[6]

The vital importance of perseverance enters no less

[1] St. Matt. x. 16-24. [2] St. Luke xxii. 28, 29. [3] *Ib.* ix. 62.
[4] St. Luke xiv. 28-30. [5] St. John xv. 9, 10. [6] *Ib.* iv. 34; xvii. 4; xix. 30.

constantly into the teaching of the Apostles. St. Paul warns the convert from heathenism at Rome, "Thou standest by faith; be not high-minded, but fear." He bids the Corinthians "so run that they may obtain"; or again, "to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know that their labour is not in vain in the Lord"; or again, in to-day's Epistle,[1] in view of the conduct of apostate Israel of old, "while they stand, to take heed lest they fall." The Galatians had fallen away from the apostolic doctrine into Judaising error; and accordingly St. Paul wonders that they have "so soon removed from him that called them into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel"; and asks if they are so foolish as to think that "having begun in the Spirit, they will be made perfect in the flesh." The Thessalonians are bidden "not be weary in well-doing"; Timothy is told by the Apostle in his last Epistle that his master "has fought a good fight, has finished his course, and has kept the faith, so that henceforth there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness." The Epistle to the Hebrews, written as it was to a Christian Church under peculiar temptations to relapse altogether into Judaism, is full of this question of perseverance; and it contains the two passages on the difficulty of recovering those who have apostatised which excited so much attention and occasioned so much perplexity in the early ages of the Church.[2] The other Apostles write to the same effect. St. John warns the elect lady and her children: "Look to yourselves, that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward." St. Jude describes the fall of those "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." And our Lord's warnings to the angels or bishops

[1] *i.e.* the Epistle for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity.
[2] Heb. vi. 4-6; x. 26-29.

of the seven Asiatic Churches often turn on this point. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life";[1] "Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown."[2]

In the early days of the Church, too, this question of perseverance occupied the attention of Christians much more than has been the case in modern times. Few of the great teachers of the Primitive Church leave the matter quite untouched. St. Cyprian at Carthage wrote on it with a fervour which was heightened by the persecutions raging around him. St. Jerome enters on it at length with one of those correspondents in whose spiritual welfare he took such deep interest. One of the most valuable of the treatises of St. Augustine is that "On the Gift of Perseverance."

In our day it is much more in the background of thought, even in the case of serious Christians. They take it for granted that they will and must persevere; that as they grow older they will certainly grow better; that they "will go from strength to strength until they appear before God in Zion." And if we ask how and why, the answer will be,—if there is any answer,—sometimes, by the inert force of religious habit; sometimes, by the active force of natural will; sometimes, by the irresistible force of Divine grace.

I.

(*a*) It is assumed, first of all, that perseverance will be easy, as a matter of habit. Once be a Christian, and have formed Christian modes of thought and practice, and why not go on? The Christian life is thus conceived of as though it were moving on a line of rails which prevents divergence to the right hand or the left. The line may traverse a district with a very broken surface; sometimes

[1] Rev. ii. 10. [2] *Ib.* iii. 11.

it is carried along a high embankment; sometimes it buries itself in deep cuttings, or in dark tunnels; but its general direction is constant; its gradients are moderate; the rolling stock which is placed on it goes forward as a matter of course; and nothing but a catastrophe, which a study of the doctrine of chances seems to make highly improbable, can interfere with safe arrival at the terminus at the other end of the line. Habit is like those iron rods which, without checking movement, prescribe its direction, and so secure the attainment of the end.

Habit, brethren, no doubt is a great power in human life. If we were to examine all the acts of a single day, and the motives which produced them, we should probably find that nearly three-quarters were dictated by habit. We walk, eat, sleep, move our bodies, manage the several faculties of our minds, very largely indeed by habit; we do not think of each successive act, we do it instinctively because the law of habit impels us. And there is no doubt that many of our religious duties become, in the course of years, matters of habit; sometimes in a good sense, sometimes in a bad. In a good sense, when habit prompts obedience, but does not deaden the conscious seriousness and meaning which we throw into each particular act: in a bad sense, when all such consciousness and meaning has gone, and habit is merely the surviving mechanism or the skeleton of a life that is no more,—carrying on the outward framework of prayer and piety, while the spirit, motives, temper, purpose, which should animate it is gone. This is what we call formalism; that is, not the observance of forms as such,—since some forms are necessary for all religions, even the most puritanical,—but the observance of forms which are mere forms, forms which have no living meaning, forms which are prescribed by habit, and which are not seconded and vivified by the inner devotion or deliberate intention of the soul. It is

clear that habit of this kind, extending only to the outer framework, and not to the spirit, motives, and temper of a religious life, is no sort of guarantee for perseverance. It is in no condition to withstand a shock, or to surmount an obstacle. It is like a scaffolding still remaining in the air, when the building which it supported and which supported it is removed; it is clearly in a precarious situation, and may even come down with a crash at any moment.

(β) It is supposed, secondly, that perseverance can be achieved by determination; by the resolute effort of a strong natural will.

We English, it has been said, are, as a rule, by nature Pelagians. A self-reliant people, with good reasons in the past for knowing that we have qualities which can hold their own against the world, we carry sometimes into our religious life a temper which is strangely out of place in it. Will can do a great deal in the order and sphere of nature. It can make the most of time, it can crush down opponents, it can silence insurgent passion, it can make light of formidable obstacles, it can lash decaying strength into unwonted effort, it can conquer lassitude, fear, misgiving. Most self-made men, to use a familiar phrase, are men of some intelligence and common sense, but of still more will; will it is that has surmounted the successive difficulties which hampered them, and by conquering which they are what they are. But it does not follow from this that will can persevere in such a region as that of the Christian life. The will can do much,—almost everything, except be sure of itself under circumstances which are against the grain of nature. The will to persevere must exist in force, before the will can achieve perseverance. And such a will to persevere is not a matter of course, like the will to get on in business in one class of men, or the will to rise in society in another. The will to be a downright Christian to the

end of life must be rooted in a deep constantly-present sense of the preciousness and the difficulty of being a downright Christian, and of the need of constant supplies of grace and strength from God in order to be one. Without God we are not able to please Him; and natural will, however strong, is a sorry substitute in this matter for supernatural grace.

(γ) Then, again, and in a very different quarter, it is assumed that, if a man once has the grace of Jesus Christ in his heart, he must persevere in the Christian life. This is what is called the doctrine of indefectible grace. It is no part of the Apostolic teaching; it is a creation of the genius—the misdirected genius, as we must think it—of Calvin. Calvin wanted to find and proclaim a sort of personal assurance of salvation which might stand timid and doubtful minds in good stead in an age of religious revolution, when the old landmarks of authority were being lost sight of, and there was a disposition abroad to despair of the power of religion to present anything as fixed and certain. To the mass of minds in this condition Calvin said in effect: "Only be satisfied that you have once "received God's grace in conversion, and it must be well "with you whatever you may say or do. His grace, once "given, is never withdrawn. His grace, once given, proves "His will to save you; and is not His will stronger than "yours? Did not our Saviour say that none should pluck "out of the Father's hand those whom the Father had given "Him? Did not St. Paul lay down the rule that the gifts "and calling of God are without repentance,—in individuals, "it may be presumed, no less than in nations? Did not "St. John teach that he that is born of God sinneth not, "and that the wicked one toucheth him not? Is it, after "all, strange, that if the Almighty Being deigns to visit us "at all, His lightest touch should have a resistless power? "and can our hearts refuse to welcome a message which

"thus summarily relieves us of anxiety, and makes us "comfortable for the rest of our existence?"

Calvin, I have said, was a man of genius; but it may be questioned whether any misrepresentation of the Apostolic teaching since the days of the Apostles themselves has, upon the whole, done more mischief than this theory of indefectible grace. It is, I say, a misrepresentation of the teaching of the New Testament, since it entirely ignores the drift of the greater part of it in order to fix a particular sense upon a few isolated passages. When our Lord says that none can pluck from the Father's hand those who are His,[1] He does not say that they who are His may not themselves break or fall away from Him. What else is the meaning of His question, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"[2] When St. Paul says that God's gifts are without repentance[3] on God's part, he does not add that they cannot be rejected by man, since this had already been the case with that very generation of Jews about which he was writing to the Romans. When St. John says that "he that is born of God sinneth not,"[4] he does not forget his own saying, "If we say that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us";[5] he only urges that that in us which sins is not the principle of the new life,—that a regenerate man, so far as his new nature controls him, does not sin. On the other hand, our Lord and His Apostles treat human nature as free, practically, to choose evil, even when under the influence of grace. Not to multiply quotations, consider that pathetic account of his own self-discipline which St. Paul writes to the church of Corinth: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." Why? "Lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a reprobate."[6] There is no question that St. Paul was in a

[1] St. John x. 28. [2] *Ib.* vi. 70. [3] Rom. xi. 29.
[4] 1 St. John v. 18. [5] *Ib.* i. 8. [6] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

state of grace when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. If language has any meaning, there can be as little question that he distinctly put before his eyes as a fearful possibility, the contingency of his forfeiting, by an unchastened life, the great graces which he had received,—and that altogether.

The ruinous consequences of this misapprehension about grace are not far to seek. It reduces the Christian Sacraments to the level of mere charms. Christians believe that the Sacraments are means of grace; that grace, not otherwise to be had, so far as we know at least with certainty, is certainly conveyed through them as its appointed channels. But if this grace, instead of being a Divine gift which may be forfeited by unfaithfulness, is held to be an endowment which, once conveyed, can never be withdrawn, the Sacraments become means of ensuring our salvation mechanically, and without influencing our lives. And thus persons who believe grace to be indefectible, have tried to avoid this error by taking refuge in an error still greater, and denying that the Sacraments convey grace at all.

Still more mischievous is the effect of this notion of indefectible grace upon conduct. It practically has meant, in many and many a life, a fancied licence to do what a man likes, since the future after death is assumed to be already certain. If grace is indefectible, probation, properly speaking, is at an end, because free-will, properly speaking, is at an end; nothing remains but a life which, like that of a vegetable, obeys a force which is beyond resistance. What is this but fatalism,—disguised, if you will, in Christian phrases, but as destructive of the sense of moral responsibility as is the fatalism which coarsely tells us that we can control neither our conduct nor our destiny, since we issue from the blind forces of Nature which only indulge us for a passing moment with the illusion of free-will ere they bury us again in the folds of matter from which we

seemed to have emerged? Cromwell, as he lay dying, asked a question which showed that at the near approach of death this sad illusion seemed for a moment to his clear intellect to be what it really is; but a deathbed is not the place to pass in review an error which has been hugged through life; and his advisers knew how to quiet him.

No, brethren, the grace of God does not make our final perseverance inevitable. It makes it possible, probable, morally certain if you will, but morally, not mechanically certain. God, Who has made us free, respects our freedom; He does not crush it, even by His own merciful gifts; and grace no more absolutely assures heaven than does natural will or the force of habit conquer the road to it.

II.

And this leads us to ask what are the causes which make endurance to the end more or less difficult in so many Christian lives.

1. There is, first of all, what our Lord calls "the persecution that ariseth because of the word."[1] In some shape or other this is inevitable. In the text, no doubt, our Lord is thinking, at any rate partly, of literal persecution, such as the first Christians experienced at the hands of the Jews and subsequently of the pagan Roman empire. "They shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another."[2] There are persecutions and persecutions: great and bloody persecutions such as a Nero or a Decius could inaugurate, on an imposing scale; and, as we know, petty persecutions, which are all that is permitted to the native ferocity of the persecuting temper by the milder manners of a more

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 21. [2] *Ib.* xxiv. 9, 10.

civilised age. But persecution, whatever its scale, is a trial to perseverance. It is in any case friction, and, as we all know, friction, if only it be continued long enough, brings movement to a standstill unless there be a new supply of impelling force. Those who have done much for Christ have given way at last under the stress of relentless persecution. And perhaps petty persecutions are more trying to perseverance in some ways than great ones: men who would not flinch from the axe or the stake will yield to the incessant worry of domestic or local tyranny, to the persecutions which make home wretched, or the office or the shop wellnigh intolerable. Why do we pray "that those evils which the craft and subtlety of the devil or man worketh against us be brought to nought, and by the providence of God's goodness may be dispersed"?[1] It is "that we, His servants, being hurt by no persecutions, may evermore give thanks unto Him in His Holy Church." In other words, it is because persecution involves a serious risk to perseverance.

2. Then there are, as our Lord says, the "false Christs and false prophets."[2] In those days it was an adventurer who traded on the religious enthusiasm of his compatriots, and led them to some desert or mountain-side to enjoy for a moment the delirium of an impossible illusion, and then to suffer the punishment of a political offence. In our days it is a sceptical friend, or an article in a review, or the general atmosphere of the social circle in which we live. Our faith is undermined by people who talk and write the best English, and who have so much about them that is winning and agreeable that we cannot believe what is really going on. Still, after a time, we find that we have less hold on the Unseen than we had, that prayer is more difficult, conscience more sluggish, religious exertion of all kinds more unwelcome. This, I say, means

[1] Cf. the Litany. [2] St. Matt. xxiv. 24.

that the soul's hold on the central realities is, to say the least, weakened,—if that is indeed the full account of what has taken place. We cannot go on breathing a bad air and be as we were when we lived on the mountain, unless we take very great precautions. Not to take them, under such circumstances, is to be in a fair way to forfeit perseverance.

3. Then there is the weariness which steals over thought and heart with the lapse of time. Human faculties are finite; they spend themselves, and they fall back into lassitude and exhaustion. When the Apostles first followed our Lord, they tasted the exquisite pleasure of a new spiritual sensation,—fascinating, exhilarating, overpowering in its enjoyment. "We have found the Messiah"[1] included all that was meant by this experience: they could say no more. There are moments in all lives which from the nature of the case cannot be repeated. Such is the joy of the schoolboy who has just won his first prize. Such is the joy of the young couple who have, in spite of many obstacles, just been wedded. Such is the joy of the parent whose child has recovered from a first and all but fatal illness. So too in the mental and moral spheres: the first large and true view of intellectual truth, lying out like a vast landscape before the mind's eye, the first act of pure and real self-sacrifice,—these too bring, each in its way, a pleasure too keen and intense to last, our natural faculties being what they are. We cannot sustain ourselves at these elevations: it is permitted us to mount, but we pass our allotted moments, and then we descend. So too in the highest life of the soul; though here we Christians have Divine grace to help us, and the circumstances are not altogether parallel. Yet who that has ever known it can forget the soul's first distinctly felt vision and embrace of

[1] St. John i. 41.

the Christian Creed, and of Him Who is its Centre and its Subject? Who can forget that spring-time of the truest life, when sacred words, learnt in boyhood, but not yet really understood, blossomed out all at once into vivid and overpowering meaning; when the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Intercession, were first felt to be moments or acts in the life of a Friend much nearer to us than the nearest relatives; when the inestimable love of the Redemption, and the transcendental glory of the Risen Life of Jesus, and the operative presence and power of the Spirit and of the Sacraments in the Church or Body of Christ, first meant for us what the Apostle's words meant to the men who first read the Epistle to the Ephesians? Those who have known these joys do not forget them; but they are joys which in their first buoyancy and freshness cannot be entirely repeated in this life. St. Paul never lived over again the scene on the road to Damascus. St. Augustine never renewed the unique experience which he has described in the most interesting chapter of his Confessions.[1]

And thus it is that after these great experiences there is, I do not say a relapse, but a condition of less keenness of insight, less tension of will, less warmth of affection, less conscious effort of intelligence and passion. Lookers-on say, The excitement has passed: the sway of common-sense has begun again. The soul too, it knows that something has passed from it—inevitably, no doubt, and from the nature of the case; and with this knowledge comes depression. This depression is in its way a trial, permitted, as we may believe, in order to make our service of God more unselfish than it would be if it were sustained throughout life by an uninterrupted sense of ecstasy. But it is a trial under which some have failed. At such times of depression, the old life, the world,

[1] *Confessions*, Book viii. cp. xii.

unbelief, the old half-sleeping passions, put in a plea for another hearing, and the soul perhaps listens; and then it may be that all is lost, and perseverance forfeited.

4. Once more, there is the trifling with conscience; not necessarily in great matters, but in a number of little matters. Omission of morning and evening prayers, or their curtailment; neglect of a regular review of conduct; carelessness as to the objects upon which money is laid out, and as to the proportion which is given to works of religion and mercy; recklessness in intercourse with others, especially if younger or less well-informed: these and like matters help forward a dull and inoperative condition of conscience which is itself preparatory to some great failure. Nor may we forget, that if this is so, we are not alone, and that there are around us unseen and malignant powers who are bent upon our ruin. There is a school of philosophers which maintains that in the world of nature there are, properly speaking, no such things as catastrophes; that what look like catastrophes to us are in reality only the result of a long series of causes steadily working on until at last they find expression in the earthquake or the hurricane. So it is, generally speaking, in the moral and spiritual world. When a man is converted to a true Christian life of faith and obedience, be sure that many an influence was obeyed, many a ray of light welcomed, many an attraction of grace cherished and responded to before the decisive moment came. And a great fall from grace has its appropriate antecedents too; little acts of unfaithfulness, petty disloyalties to light and truth,—we do not see the process, but it goes forward none the less,—and at last comes the tragic issue: the breaking away from the realms of light, of a Demas, or of a Lammenais. The old saying that no man becomes very bad all of a sudden—*nemo repente fuit turpissimus*—applies to the life of faith as well as of conduct. When a

star falls from heaven we may be sure that there have been subtle and complex causes for some time at work ere the catastrophe was possible.

It is a frightful tragedy, in Christians' eyes, when it happens, this forfeiture of perseverance; when, as in the lesson just read, Solomon deserts the true God for Ashtoreth;[1] when "the grey-haired saint" fails at last.[2] It is like being wrecked, not in mid-ocean, but almost at the harbour's mouth, and within a measurable distance of safety and of home. To have gone on for years believing, hoping, loving, as a Christian should; to have lived for long a life of which at times prayer was the breath and conscience the motive power; to have had all one's delight in the saints that are in the earth, and upon such as excel in virtue; to have been admitted as a Christian soul can be admitted to the intimate knowledge and embrace of Christ; to have passed years, perhaps, even among His bodyguard and chosen associates;—and then to lose all faith, hope, love, the power of prayer, the voice of conscience, the sense of a sacred friendship, of a presence and a communion above this world:—to lose all, and to pass out, like Judas, into the darkness of the night—to pass out and not to return—oh! it is a tragedy! But it has happened again and again, in ancient days and in our own day; it may happen—that is the point to be kept steadily in view—to any Christian who hears me! How can we hope to retain the grace, the precious gift of perseverance?

III.

Perseverance is likely to be secured by three things especially.

First, a sense of constant dependence upon God. Since,

[1] 1 Kings xi. 5.

[2] *The Christian Year*: Hymn for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

as a matter of fact, we cannot subsist, spiritually or in any other way, except with His aid, it is well to bear this constantly in mind. To be self-confident is to be in danger, since God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. To be constantly mindful that the life of our souls depends on God,—that His right hand upholds us, if we are upheld at all,—is to be in the road to perseverance.

Next, by prayer for perseverance. We have to remember that perseverance is a distinct grace, just like faith, or hope, or charity. It must therefore be sought and won by prayer, just like those other graces; and, perhaps, by very importunate prayer. It is a good rule to set apart one day in the week to pray for particular objects; and Saturday, as the day which is often devoted by serious Christians to preparation for death, is a good day for prayers for perseverance. Do not be discouraged if, so far as you can see, your prayer does not seem to be answered at once. God may be testing your integrity of purpose. Remember Elisha's words to the king of Israel, who had not the faith which could use rightly the arrows of Israel's deliverance.[1] In order to win perseverance prayer must persevere. It is after describing all the parts of the Christian's armour,—the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of preparation, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit,—that the Apostle adds, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."[2] That is the most important point, practically speaking, of all.

Lastly, perseverance is especially assisted by keeping the mind fixed as much as possible upon the end of life, and upon all that follows it. Only let us reflect that death is as certain for each one of us as its time,

[1] 2 Kings xiii. 15-19. [2] Eph. vi. 18.

immediate cause, and attendant circumstances are matters of uncertainty, and we begin to see this life and what belongs to it in its true aspect and proportions. We learn to sit lightly to it, and to embark something less than the best half of our hearts in its concerns and interests. The shore may still be distant, but the sailor keeps his eye on it as he prays for skill and strength to weather the storm. On the heights beyond the valley of death the eyes of the predestinate constantly rest; and the sight sustains them in times of trial, darkness, despair, which must otherwise have proved fatal. "I should utterly have fainted but that I believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."[1] The end is indeed well worth the effort; and since we are in the hands of Infinite Love, the effort will be enduring if the end be kept steadily in view.

[1] Ps. xxvii. 13.

SERMON IX.

THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE.

St. Luke vi. 13.

And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named Apostles.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW, whose festival is observed to-day,[1] is not named in the first three Gospels except in the lists of the Apostles, which each of those Evangelists supplies. But he is probably the Nathanael of whom there are two very interesting notices in St. John.

Nathanael, in St. John's Gospel, occupies the kind of position which would be natural in an Apostle; for instance, he is one of the chosen seven to whom our Lord appeared at the Sea of Tiberias after His Resurrection. Moreover, as in the catalogues of the first three Gospels the names of Philip and Bartholomew are placed together, so in St. John, it is Philip who brings Nathanael to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, quite possible that the son of Tolmai[2] may have been called Nathanael by one set of persons, and his father's son by another: and this opinion has been largely entertained. It has not, however, been adopted by the Church in her use of Holy Scripture for the services of to-day. No reference is made in these extracts to Nathanael, and as we know nothing independently of this Bartholomew except his name, we are led by the Church to think of the Apostles as a class,

[1] *i.e.* August the 24th.

[2] The word Bartholomew means "Son of Tolmai."

both in the Epistle and Gospel, and more remotely in the proper lessons for the day. The Epistle[1] describes the early labours of the Apostles, in which Bartholomew must have taken part; the Gospel, the rule or spirit of their order, as prescribed by our Lord, by which Bartholomew must have guided his life. And of the proper lessons, the vision of Jacob in one tells of the blessing of all nations through the seed of the patriarchs,—a blessing which it was the business of the Apostles to proclaim and disseminate; while in the other the predicted Prophet Whom the Lord would raise up in the latter days, was at once the Subject of apostolic preaching and the Source of apostolic authority.

If the passage before us teaches us anything, it teaches us that the sending forth of His Apostles was, in our Lord's judgment, a matter of great importance; He does not at all treat it as though it belonged to the subordinate detail of His work.

We can imagine a modern teacher nominating a committee or board of trusted friends, when a long day's work was over, and he could afford to withdraw his attention from the great ideas which usually occupied it to settle what he might deem a mere matter of ordinary business or procedure. Not so the Saviour of the world when choosing from among men the elect souls who were to lay broad and deep the foundations of the Universal Church. On one day, at least, in His earthly life, He made the calling His twelve Apostles the first business that engaged Him; and He prepared for it accordingly. "And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named Apostles."

We cannot mistake the meaning of that long intercession

[1] Acts v. 12-16.

continued throughout the night on the mountain side, and only closed when the day had dawned and it was time to engage in its duties. Perhaps, to our imperfect estimate, it might have seemed that there were many other acts in our Divine Saviour's life which might have been more fitly preceded by a night of sustained intercession. But no! we have to deal with facts, and it is plain that in our Lord's judgment the choosing of His Apostles was an act of the first order of serious importance.

Let us then ask ourselves, What were the Apostles? What were the characteristics that marked them off from other men?

I.

First of all, then, as their name implies, the Apostles were *sent* to do a given work. They were entrusted with a commission. They did not, as men put it, set up for themselves; they were not in the position of finding a doctrine left by a great religious teacher ready to their hands, and then setting themselves, by their own authority and sense of enterprise, to enforce, and illustrate, and explain, and expand, and defend, and propagate it. Their case was quite different. They were sent to do what they did, and they did what they did because they were sent. Compare with this what has happened in the case of philosophies—the thoughts of men on the highest subjects as distinct from the revelation of God among us. What is the truth about them? When Socrates died, there was a sort of intellectual scramble for the ideas which he had set in motion by his clever way of making even sluggish people think. One pupil secured one bit of the master's mind, and another another; and each coloured what he carried off with ideas of his own. And so, in time, two or three or more philosophies were before the world, all claiming to be in some sense descended from Socrates,

while exhibiting the greatest divergence from each other in consequence of the effort of each pupil to be original. The same thing has happened within the lifetime of the older of us in the case of the German philosopher Hegel. No sooner was Hegel gone than a great discussion began as to what he had really meant. One set of thinkers maintained that he was profoundly religious and Christian, only with a deeper insight into the true relations of thought and being than that of Christians of an old-fashioned type. Another set, with equal positiveness, claimed him as a prince of destructive thought, who would apply solvents to every moral and religious conviction in succession, and who would surely conduct his most loyal and intelligent followers to the gates of pure materialism. These are but instances of what has often happened in the history of the human mind. And our Lord would not drop His treasure of heavenly truth upon the soil of Palestine to be picked up, and inspected, and dissected, and mutilated, and contracted and expanded, and extolled and caricatured, first by one enterprising rabbi, and then by another. He would provide for the inevitable future: He would commit His treasure to hands whom He could trust: "When it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named Apostles."

An Apostle, then, is, before all things, a man with a consciousness of having been sent on a mission to do a certain work. Compare him with a familiar figure in the world around us—I mean that of the professor. The professor of our day represents knowledge, without any necessary accompaniment of conviction, and without the enthusiasm and passion which belong to conviction. For the professor all facts, all opinions, are equally interesting; everything is regarded simply as material for analysis and discussion. His aim is to secure or to affect a lofty impartiality

which, whatever else it may be, is not generally favourable to strenuous moral effort. If our Lord had left the world without making any provision for the propagation of the faith by the Apostles and their successors, and if a company of professors of the modern type could have stepped upon the scene, they would no doubt have given some very interesting lectures on the life of Jesus Christ, but whatever else had happened, they would not have converted the world. When, then, our Lord selects twelve persons from among His followers to send, as from Himself, on a mission to convert first the Jewish people and then all nations, He unveils before our eyes a sublime consciousness of what He is, and of what He has to do among men.

A philosopher may have pupils who will spontaneously cling to his phrases, expand his ideas, reproduce his mental mannerisms, do anything they can to give consistency and range to his school of opinion. But no philosopher was ever heard of who chose out some of his pupils from among the rest, and gave them a commission to convert the world to his ideas. Nor is anything of the kind traceable among the prophets. Elijah's mantle may fall on Elisha, but Elijah does not send Elisha forth to propagate his name and teaching; there is no such difference in their standing as to warrant his doing anything of the kind. Our Lord, we see, assumes at once and naturally a place which others do not even claim. He looks out upon the coming centuries; He will not leave to any others the question what is to become of His work: He provides for it at once. Already He sees before Him the men who are to shape an organisation that shall carry on His work to distant times, and He gives them—not a diploma to lecture, but a mission to make disciples of the world, as in the second lesson which has just been read: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[1]

This mission from our Lord, confirmed and vivified by the Holy Spirit, was the force at the disposal of the Apostles. They had little or nothing else. In the world of thought, of society, of political influence, they were nowhere. They were simple peasants, speaking a broad provincial dialect, and with the narrow range of view and contracted sympathies which would be natural to men in their circumstances. One of them, Matthew, had farmed the taxes, and had a little more property than the others; one of them had a Greek name, Philip, which may or may not have meant a very slight measure of Greek culture. But take them as a whole, and they were related to the educated and ruling classes in Jerusalem much as twelve peasants of Yorkshire or Devonshire might be to the educated class in London. Their only resource was that they had been sent. But it was more than sufficient. Some years later there were Christians at Corinth who had been delighted by the polished language and literary resource of Apollos of Alexandria, and who insisted that these accomplishments were not merely desirable, as they well may be, but necessary in the envoys of Jesus Christ. But St. Paul, who himself possessed the advantages in which the twelve were generally wanting, would have none of it. "Ye see your calling, brethren,"—he is surely thinking of the twelve when he writes thus to the new Christians at Corinth,—"how that not many wise men after an earthly standard, not many powerful, not many noble are called" into the Church, "but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the

[1] St. Matt. xxviii. 18-20.

weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence."[1]

Depend on it, brethren, the sense of being sent by God to do whatever we have to do in this world supplies moral power. We have it exactly in the degree in which we honestly try to do God's will: and it makes us all, in a lower but a true sense, His apostles. It supplies patience, courage, determination when, if we thought we were only following our own inclinations, these qualities would be wholly wanting; just as it made those Galilean peasants into men of even heroic stature, able to act and to suffer at a moment's notice,—able to undertake the conversion of the world.

II.

Secondly, the Apostles were men with a definite work in hand. They were to witness to the world what their Master had been, and had done and suffered, while they were with Him. Thus in the Supper-room, after promising that "the Comforter, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, Which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me," He adds: "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning."[2] And this is repeated more distinctly, at the very moment of His ascending into heaven: "Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."[3] Accordingly, when the Apostles met to elect, under Divine guidance, a successor to the unhappy Judas, St.

[1] 1 Cor. i. 26-29. [2] St. John xv. 26, 27. [3] Acts i. 8.

Peter laid down the indispensable conditions which must be required in a candidate:—he must have been in circumstances to bear, as from personal experience, the apostolic witness: he must have been among the disciples continuously from the date of our Lord's Baptism until the date of His Ascension into heaven. "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His Resurrection."[1] And so St. John opens his first Epistle by proclaiming that the teaching of the Apostles about the Divine Nature of our Saviour was based upon their close personal contact with Him during His earthly life: "That Which was from the beginning, Which we have heard, Which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the Life was manifested, and we have seen It, and bear witness, and shew unto you that Eternal Life, Which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That Which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."[2]

The work of the Apostles then was, before all things, a witness. It was a witness to the whole manifestation and earthly career of our Blessed Lord; but it was especially a witness to that one most wonderful event, to which He Himself appealed as the great certificate of His claims, and the disproof of which, as His Apostle said, would make Christian faith in Him utterly vain and worthless.[3] Of course, I mean His Resurrection. So St. Peter said, in a passage already referred to, "One must be ordained to be a witness with us of His Resurrection." Of the reality of this great event every Apostle was an eye-witness; and it was their business to tell the world what they had seen.

[1] Acts i. 21, 22. [2] 1 St. John i. 1-3. [3] 1 Cor. xv. 17.

If it be said that the testimony of other men, be they who they may, is less satisfactory than personal experience, I reply that the testimony of others is, from the nature of the case, all that we can have to assure us of the truth of events that happened in distant places or times. And if it be rejoined that instead of thus making acceptance of the Gospel depend upon the testimony of others to events which we could not witness ourselves, God might have made to every man a direct personal revelation of revealed truth, just as He has made to every man a direct personal revelation of that moral law which is written in the heart of every man, it must be answered that in this, as in other matters, we must take things as we find them, and that as they are they are better than they would be if we had had the ordering them. As a matter of fact, most of our knowledge, in all departments of life, depends upon testimony. It cannot but be so: we have little time and strength for the labour of the observation and verification which would enable us to dispense with the witness of others; or the opportunity of making these efforts at all is wholly out of our reach. We depend on others,—on the historian who has consulted original documents, on the physiologist who has spent years in his laboratory, on the traveller who has taken note of what he has seen and heard, on the statesman who has a large outlook and who knows how to ally the experience of the past to the requirements of the present, and who forms his judgments accordingly. We are in their hands, you and I; we have not time, ability, opportunity, to revise their conclusions; we accept what they say on testimony. Nay, it is singular and instructive to observe that the opponents of the Christian faith are constantly witnessing to the principle of reliance on testimony. They say, Science says so-and-so, or, Criticism says so-and-so; just as we say, "The Bible says this,"

or "The Church teaches that." When they say that Science or Criticism has laid down a position which they take for granted, what they mean is that other men, in whose ability and honesty they have confidence, have arrived at conclusions by steps which they have not been able personally to verify, but which, as they deem it reasonable to take for granted, were adequate steps, on account of their belief in the men. But they are just as dependent on testimony, just as reliant on the principle of the authority of testimony, as are you and I, when we believe the history of the Gospels, or its equivalent, the language of the Nicene Creed.

The Apostles then had to bear a witness. And they bore it in three ways; by their words, their work, and their sufferings. They preached Christ. They built up the Church, the temple of redeemed souls. They died for Christ.

1. Christ our Lord was the great subject of the teaching of the Apostles. They began, generally speaking, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles, with His Resurrection from the dead. They knew His Resurrection to be a fact from personal experience; and by saying again and again that they had seen Him risen, they carried conviction to the minds of their hearers. Then they went on to describe His Crucifixion, and its wonderful meaning for the lost race of man: at Corinth St. Paul determined to know nothing among his audience save Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified. But besides this, they seem to have repeated in a simple way what they had seen our Lord do, and had heard Him say, during the years of their companionship with Him; thus giving, indirectly but fully, a complete impression of His character. And here we have the true account, as it seems, of the way in which the Gospels were written. Looking to their manner of composition and structural method, it is hardly probable that each Evangelist

sat down to write his narrative as a modern author might sit down to write a book from memory, or out of the contents of old documents lying before him. The Gospels are evidently made up out of the contemporary preaching of the Apostles; and their differences in method and style are largely to be accounted for by the differences in the audiences which the Apostles addressed. St. Matthew, no doubt, preached in Judæa, and to populations who first of all required to be satisfied that Jesus corresponded to the Messiah of prophecy. Hence his frequent, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet." St. Mark took notes from the preaching of St. Peter to audiences still Jewish, but more in contact with the Greek and Roman world. St. Luke grouped together those features of our Lord's work and teaching which were repeated again and again in the cities of Greece and Asia Minor, as illustrating the aspects of redemption specially insisted on by St. Paul. St. John supplies what earlier narratives had omitted; but in his Gospel we have the record of a teaching addressed to populations, whether at Ephesus or elsewhere, deeply influenced by Alexandrian modes of thought. The Gospels, as we have them, grew out of the oral teaching of the Apostles, reduced to writing and order, either, as in the case of the first and last, by the Apostles themselves, or, as in that of the other two, by persons in their confidence. This will explain the differences of order in the narratives, the repetitions, the expansions, even the apparent discrepancies. The Gospels are not systematised narratives; they are collections of popular instructions on the Birth, work, words, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord, addressed by those who had lived with Him from His Baptism until His Ascension, to the various populations whose conversion or edification they were engaged in promoting.

And if it be asked why we should trust the witness of

the Apostles, I answer that their witness, as recorded by themselves or their reporters in the Gospels, shows that they were at once sincere and accurate. They were sincere; for this reason only, if for no other, that their report tells so largely against themselves. When we talk or write about ourselves, brethren, we have no objection to referring to our good deeds. Rather than say nothing—if some autobiographies are to be trusted,—we do not object to telling the world of great misdeeds, which circumstance or passion may be thought to palliate. But two things we do not generally tell the world, if we can help it:—we say nothing of those passages in our lives which illustrate our stupidity or our meanness. Yet this is what the Apostles have done in their memoirs of their Master. They tell us how little they could understand His plainest words; how gross and earthly was the construction which they put upon His most heavenly teaching. They tell us how, when He was preparing to lay down His life, they were disputing who should be first in His kingdom; they tell us of their mutual envy, of their rivalries, their suspicions; how they counted the cost of the ointment that was poured on the Master's feet; how they slept while the blood dropped from His forehead in the agony of Gethsemane; how they forsook Him and fled, when discipleship involved the honour of personal danger. These are things which men do not tell about themselves unless they are perfectly sincere.

And the Apostles were not more sincere than accurate. The picture which they have drawn of their Master is itself a proof that they were copyists, not inventors. To have copied such an original is sufficiently wonderful, but it was possible by the simple method of keeping close to fact. But to have invented it was not possible for the Apostles any more than for the Christians of the second century. That perfect harmony of the most opposite excel-

lencies; that majestic calmness, and that unwearied activity; that perfect obedience, and that awful authority which none might dispute; that matchless tenderness and that keen severity; that hatred of evil, and that love of sinners—could the Apostles have invented this? No; their work is itself a proof that they were witnesses of a greatness which they could not have imagined.

2. But the Apostles did not only witness to Christ our Lord by speaking and writing. They were the earliest workmen in building up that great society which sprang into existence on the day of Pentecost, and which will be in the world to the end of time. If a man unhappily believes nothing of the Christian Creed or the Christian Gospels, he cannot help seeing that, as a matter of fact, the Christian Church exists. Here it is before his eyes; here it is, spread more or less in every continent, gathering adherents from every race,—a body not merely co-extensive with civilisation, but overpassing its frontiers. Here it is, bearing many traces of the conflicts and struggles through which it has passed; wounds, scars, fissures, disfigure it: but still here it is; and the question is, "How did it come to be?" No society is created for the mere pleasure of making it; it represents some cause, object, idea, faith, common to all its members; some enthusiasm, which must have had something to say for itself, and that called it into being: some profound conviction that possessed the minds of those who raised it out of the dust and chaos of human life. That question must be answered; and in its answer we discover that, in the Christian Church, the Apostles erected in the world a standing advertisement of the Christian Faith,—of the Life and Death and Resurrection,—especially of the Resurrection—of our Lord Jesus Christ,—apart from which the existence of the Christian Church could not be intelligently accounted for. No doubt her action and machinery have a primary

object of their own, the salvation and sanctification of souls, achieved by bringing them into contact with the Ever-living Redeemer; this is the prime motive and secret of all that meets the eye,—services, sacraments, sermons, with all the incidental and informal apparatus of her daily activity among men. But a secondary, and scarcely less important result of all this is that it is a continuous proclamation—as I have said, an incessant advertisement, of the claims of Christianity. Each time that the eye rests on the London Monument, a man who knows the history of this city thinks of the Great Fire. Each time that the mind contemplates the action and existence of that vast corporation, the Christian Church, it is carried onward and upward to one reason which called it into being, and which our Lord Himself sanctioned. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid";[1] and the men who built up the walls of the great kingdom of souls knew what they were doing to proclaim the claims of the King upon the thoughts and hearts of men.

3. Once more, the Apostles bore witness to our Lord Jesus Christ by dying for Him. Deeds mean more than words, and sufferings than deeds. The best gift that any man has to give is life. The love of our Lord for sinners is to be measured, not by any abstract tests of intensity, but by the fact that He died for them. Except St. John, the Apostles were all martyrs; and St. John was a martyr in will though not in deed. Legends may have gathered round their names; the instruments of martyrdom with which Christian art usually associates each Apostle may or may not be accurate: the general fact to which they point is beyond dispute. They too, as others, crowned their work by suffering; they too "came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb."[2]

[1] St. Matt. v. 14.

[2] Rev. vii. 14.

III.

A last characteristic of the Apostles, shared by them in different degrees, is their obscurity. We have some difficulty in doing justice to this feature of their lives.

In an age of newspapers, railroads, telegraphs, we can hardly separate great excellence from some degree of notoriety: and the names of Christ's Apostles have so long been enshrined in the Gospels, and made radiant in the calendar of the Church, and appropriated as names of honour by generations of Christians, that it seems impossible to think of them as obscure. Yet what is the fact? We know several particulars about St. Peter and St. John, but of the others individually how few! The account of an Apostle's conversion, or a single episode in his life, or a question asked and answered, a moment of prominence and recognition in the Redeemer's presence, followed by disappearance: that is all. We know little of the other son of Zebedee, and of our Lord's cousin, St. James the Less; we know less of St. Andrew, and Philip, and Thomas, and Matthias, and Matthew. St. James and St. Jude are little more than names. If Bartholomew is the Nathanael of St. John we get one beautiful impression of his character; if not, he too is but a name. Certainly they are names which will live to the end of time: but as even now we know so little about them, so their bearers worked and died for the most part in an obscurity which commonly escapes us. Had we been contemporaries, we might perchance have seen an Apostle at his work, talking to the poorest classes in the bazaar of some Asiatic town, or amid the shipping of some Mediterranean seaport,—a man in dress, speech, bearing, scarcely distinguishable from the poor simple folk around him. It was otherwise, no doubt, with Paul of Tarsus,

but he had a special work, and though fully their equal, he was not one of the original twelve.

And this obscurity of the greater part of our Lord's Apostles is surely not without encouragement for the majority of those who do anything for our Lord Jesus Christ in the modern world. They may be tempted sometimes, in desponding moments, to think themselves unrecognised, to cast an envious glance at other workers in the sacred field whose names are in every one's mouth,—at missionaries who traverse continents followed by the admiring sympathies of multitudes,—at prelates who rule vast and ancient Churches,—at writers whose works are gratefully enshrined in every Christian library. Little do they understand the greatness of obscurity; at least its possible, if not its necessary, greatness. Here is St. Bartholomew, of whom we know nothing as compared with what we know of any modern missionary bishop,—of Heber, of Selwyn, of Mackenzie, Milman, Patteson, Steere. We have the diaries of these men, their letters, in some cases their biographies: every incident in their lives belongs to Church history; but of Christ's Apostle whom we hold in high honour to-day, it is doubtful, even now, whether he laid down his life in India or Armenia; almost everything is uncertain and in shadow. Yet thus he and others in the sacred college are the types of the great majority of Christian workers, who never attain to contemporary fame, and who, if they are wise, never seek it. Bartholomew is the fellow and patron of thousands of country curates, and village schoolmasters, and sisters of charity, and district visitors, and lay helpers, and Christian people with no official designation whatever, who do good deeds with silent reference to their unseen Maker's Name and honour, and speak words of truth, because in their eyes truth is lovely, and they need no other motive for uttering it. It is on this vast mass of unrecognised

labour, of unwitnessed self-sacrifice, that the structure of the Eternal Church really rests, just as its first foundations were laid in the Apostles and Prophets of the Lord. The cross and ball which glitter on the summit of this dome in these bright August days catch the eye of every Londoner, but they do nothing to support the immense fabric which they so appropriately crown: deep below the sod, where no human eye ever penetrates, are the vast massive blocks on which everything rests that is reared above. So it is in the kingdom of spirits; that which is noblest, truest, grandest is generally unseen. It is unseen in these brief days of time, when we grope our way for the most part in a mist, and see objects out of their true proportions, and are governed by fictitious standards of excellence and greatness. But the day of revelation is only tarrying. Let us do justice to the hopes of the unrecognised, by turning our thoughts to St. Bartholomew and the other humble peasants to whom the Almighty Redeemer said in the Gospel for to-day, "Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."[1]

[1] St. Luke xxii. 28-30.

SERMON X.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF WISDOM.

St. Luke vii. 35.

And Wisdom is justified of all her children.

OUR Lord is discussing the criticisms which the Jews of His day made upon Himself and St. John the Baptist. St. John was a strict ascetic, leading a hermit life in the desert; and the Jews said that he was possessed by an evil spirit. Our Lord, on the other hand, mixed freely with the world: He was at the wedding-feast in Cana; He was at the entertainments given by Levi the publican and by Simon the Pharisee. The Jews forthwith condemned Him as a man devoted to the pleasures of the table, and fond of low company. "John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" Whatever they might be or do, it seemed neither our Lord nor the Baptist would be free from censure. Our Lord accounts for this by describing the Jews of that generation as entirely wanting in seriousness. He compares them to children playing in the public thoroughfare, imitating in their games, as children do, the occasions and solemnities of adult life;—playing at weddings, playing at funerals, and reproducing as best they might the appropriate tunes, whether merry or mournful. And

in the eyes of these Jews, the Baptist and the Divine Speaker Himself were like ill-natured playfellows who did not enter into their games, or who at any rate would not take the parts assigned them. "We have piped unto you"—so runs the Jewish complaint or remonstrance—"we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not wept." The Baptist did not respond to the invitation to merriment; our Lord did not respond to the invitation to what would have been in Him an inappropriate penitential sadness. The Jews therefore condemned them, but for contradictory reasons: St. John for not being what our Lord was, and our Lord for not resembling St. John. It could not be helped; that generation of Jews would know no better, but the true children of the Divine Wisdom would know that both St. John and our Lord were right in adhering to their different modes of life. "Wisdom," He said, "is justified"—or, done justice to as being wisdom—"of all her children."

"Wisdom is justified of all her children." Our Lord's saying grows naturally out of the comparison which He has just made. The children sitting in the world's market-place suggest to Him another sort of children, the children of Wisdom. Wisdom is represented as a parent; a certain number of human beings are children of Wisdom; and children, as a rule, may be expected to understand their parents, and to do them justice, when the world at large finds fault with them. A child, it may be presumed, is more or less like his parent. He has a sympathy with him, arising out of common character and mental constitution, which enables him to understand what his parent means. He is familiar, from long association and habit, with his parent's ways of looking at things. He is in the secret of his parent's mind. He sees method where others can see only confusion. He can anticipate with

confidence where to others all is dark and meaningless. Thus, our Lord tells us, if Wisdom is misunderstood by men at large, there is no such misunderstanding in Wisdom's family circle: there, at least, the dull and ill-natured world is shut out, while bright and loving faces gaze upon their parent's countenance with a certainty that all is wise and well. The true children of the Eternal Wisdom were not even in those days shocked because John the Baptist came as an ascetic, or because the Son of Man came "eating and drinking."

It will be useful, perhaps, if we consider this saying of our blessed Lord's somewhat more in detail.

I.

We trace the truth and applicability of its principle, first of all, in the different fields of purely human interest and study. Each subject that engages the attention of man has a wisdom,—that is to say, governing principles, methods, modes of thought and inquiry; in short, a philosophy peculiarly its own. Those who have mastered this wisdom, even in part, are prepared for results which are startling or absurd in the eyes of others who are strangers to it. Thus, for instance, there is a chronic misunderstanding between those whose habits of thought or whose pursuits in life lead them to be conversant only or mainly with probable evidence, and the students of the exact sciences. To the first-named class the men of exact science seem to be without the mental faculty which enables them to understand the worth of an argument which is only based on probability. To the scientific men the moralists, the historians, the theologians constantly seem to be contenting themselves with what is nothing better than fancy, when they ought to be only satisfied with truth. The fact is that each department of thought has a wisdom of its own. The mathematician or

the physicist would be very ill advised if he were to content himself with probabilities; the moralist or the divine would be just as mistaken if he were to ask for experimental certainty in spheres where it is unattainable. In the world of sense the empiric understanding reigns supreme; the intrusion of heart, conscience, the moral faculty, would be here an impertinence. In the world of spiritual truth the empiric or scientific intellect is blind and powerless; the moral faculty, instructed and guided by Revelation, alone can judge. Thus each region of truth has a faculty to investigate it; each has a wisdom or principle of its own, and those who do not share in it are like ordinary Englishmen listening to rapid conversation between foreigners, or like Africans or New Zealanders inspecting for the first time a great English manufactory. In this sense each kind of human wisdom is justified by its children, and by its children only.

II.

Next, we see the truth of the principle in the region of human character. In good men there are constantly features of character which those about them cannot account for. They are reserved or impetuous, high-spirited or depressed; they deviate in many ways from conventional standards; they baulk or they disappoint expectations; they are pronounced eccentric, morbid, uncertain, inconsistent, as the case may be. They act when we expect them to hold their hands; they are quiet when all seems to call for action. We perhaps say that they are unintelligible; and so it may be they are to us, only because we are not in the secret of their characters. For each character, like each pursuit, each art, each science, has a wisdom of its own: its governing principles, its ruling instincts, its constant tendencies. Only when we

enter into these can we hope to understand it; only then do we place ourselves at the point of view of the thinker, the speaker, the agent who perplexes us; only then do we see consistency and motive where else so much seemed to be unaccountable and strange. Here, too, Wisdom is justified of her children, while, as a thing of course, others find fault with her.

Indeed, that which enables us to do justice to character is sympathy with it. We rightly condemn the coarse saying of the Jews about St. John—"He hath a devil." But is it quite certain that in their place we should have done better? What would many of us have said or thought of a man who lived as a hermit, apart from the haunts of men, only leaving his desert-home to denounce the sins of powerful classes or the vices of kings? What should we say of his raiment of camels' hair, of his meat of locusts and wild honey, or of the equivalents to those things in modern life, and all that they would imply as to character and purpose? Should we never denounce or deplore them as silly, extreme, eccentric?—unless indeed we had caught sight of the wisdom or principle which accounted for them, and of which they were the outgrowth and expression. Given St. John's keen sense of the vast evil of unrighteousness, of the necessity of making a way in men's hearts for the Divine Redeemer by bringing men to repentance, and all forthwith falls into its place; his language is even moderate; his conduct very sagacious; his life just that which was needed, if he was to succeed in impressing an age such as was his own.

As Christians, we of course judge still more sternly that Jewish saying about our Lord, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." But, had we lived in those days, is it quite certain that we should not have approved of it? The Jews resented our Lord's appearance at entertainments while He was

making serious demands upon the self-denial of mankind. Men were to deny themselves and take up the cross; and as yet He was feasting with Matthew the publican and Simon the Pharisee. Should we never have pointed to what the Jews thought a proof of laxity or worldliness? Should we have had the self-distrust, the patience, the equitableness of temper—I do not say the insight into a Divine character, or the sympathy with a Divine work, —which might have led us to perceive that His work obliged Him to mix constantly with all kinds of people, and that He could not have lived as did the Baptist without being untrue to Himself?

It does not indeed follow that because a man's conduct is often or at times unintelligible, he is therefore a misunderstood saint. The good may often be, in the world's judgment, unintelligible, but the unintelligible are not therefore always good. Eccentricity and goodness are more often disjoined than united; it would indeed go hard with the world if they were strictly convertible terms. Eccentricity is not seldom the outgrowth of vanity, whether rampant or subtle; and when this is the case the world judges it rightly in condemning it. But, nevertheless, the good often speak and act in ways which men only condemn because they do not enter into and sympathise with the lofty character of the agent or speaker. So it was when our Lord was at the house of Simon, and the poor penitent sinner anointed Him with ointment and bathed His feet with her tears. That our Lord should have allowed her to touch Him was in Simon's eyes a clear proof that He had no real knowledge of life and character; Simon himself, most assuredly, as a respectable Pharisee, would never have permitted anything of the kind. "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him." With our Lord's real mind, the mind of Him Who came to seek and to save

that which was lost, the Pharisee had no sympathy, even of an elementary sort; and he illustrated, from the negative side, the truth that it is only by the children of Divine Wisdom, who sympathise with its ruling principles, that its ways are justified.

III.

Once more, our Lord's words hold good of the Christian Creed. Here, too, it is clear that Wisdom is only justified of her children. Let us here remark that the word Wisdom in our Lord's mouth had an especial significance. As He pronounced it His more instructed hearers would have recognised an ancient and a consecrated word. In the Book of Proverbs the Wisdom of God is no mere quality, or attribute, corresponding in God to what would be wisdom in man; it is more than an attribute, it is almost what we should call in modern language a person. Read the great appeal of Wisdom in the first chapter; read the sublime passage in the eighth chapter, in which Christians have always traced the pre-existence of the Eternal Son:—

"The Lord," says Wisdom, "possessed Me in the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
I was set up from everlasting,
From the beginning, or ever the earth was.
When there were no depths, I was brought forth;
When there were no fountains abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills was I brought forth:
While as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields,
Nor the highest part of the dust of the world.
When He prepared the heavens, I was there:
When He set a compass upon the face of the depth:
When He established the clouds above:
When He strengthened the fountains of the deep:
When He gave to the sea His decree,
That the waters should not pass His commandment:

When He appointed the foundations of the earth :
Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him :
And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him ;
Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth ;
And My delights were with the sons of men." [1]

This Wisdom of God, dwelling with Him from all eternity, being Himself, and yet, in a certain sense, having personal subsistence of Its own, was, we may be very sure, in the thought of our Lord when He used the word. It was this Wisdom of God, as He elsewhere says, Who sent the prophets and wise men and scribes; nay, it was this Wisdom Which was incarnate in, Which was, Himself. No longer something abstract and intangible, It had taken flesh and blood, It had entered the world of sense, and displayed Itself in acts which struck the eye, and in words which fell upon the ears of men. This Eternal Wisdom, born of a Virgin in the fulness of time, Crucified, Buried, Risen, Ascended, is at once the Teacher and, in the main, the Substance of the Christian creed; and of this it is true, that "Wisdom is justified of all her children."

When men now-a-days reject Christianity, they reject it, as a rule, bit by bit. They first find one truth incredible, then another; until at last, so far as their minds are concerned, the whole edifice of faith crumbles away. There are several records of the beginning, the progress, and the consummation of this work of ruin in individual minds; and one feature which may strike us as common to them is this. A single truth—say the grace of Baptism, or the atoning value of our Lord's Death, or the transmission of original sin, or the union of our Lord's two Natures in one Person, or the eternal punishment of the lost—is supposed to present insurmountable difficulties. What always, or almost always, happens is that the truth is detached from the general body of Christian doctrine; it is treated as a thing complete in itself, having no neces-

[1] Prov. viii. 22-31.

sary relations with other truths; it is taken to pieces; it is then, for whatever reason, pronounced incredible. And what wonder? It is subjected to a strain which it was never meant to bear; it is placed under conditions which, except in the mind of its critic and rejecter, do not anywhere belong to it. Most assuredly the truths of the Christian Creed are not, and may not be treated as, these detached, isolated atoms; they are parts of a great whole; they shade off, one into another, by almost imperceptible gradations; they are linked one to another by common underlying principles, by laws of contrast, or by laws of correspondence; they are just as much a whole as is the world of physical nature, only, of course, an infinitely grander and more overwhelming whole; and the Eternal Wisdom, Whose mind they are, and in Whom they harmonise, "reaches across them from end to end mightily, and smoothly and sweetly ordereth all things."[1] In the light of that all-comprehending, all-combining Wisdom, the claims of the separate truths which compose it are sufficiently justified.

Take the awful truth of the punishment of the lost, as taught us by our Lord Jesus Christ. Treat it as if it stood alone, as if it were almost the only truth taught us by the Gospel, and it will almost certainly be rejected. But place it in the light of the general wisdom of the Christian Creed; of the power of the human will to become, by repeated acts, fixed in evil; of the awful holiness of God, the revelation of which is not cancelled by the revelation of His love; nay, of the atonement for sin offered on Calvary, the rejection of which thus echoes in the abyss beneath—deep answering to deep,—the deep of hatred to the deep of love—and the case is very different.

So, again, it has been said, "How can it be supposed that the destiny of a soul can in any degree depend upon

[1] Cf. Wisdom viii. 1.

a child's undergoing an outward ceremony like Baptism?" Think only of the rite, and you may well ask, How? But suppose that this is the distinctly appointed means for making us "members of Christ and children of God"; suppose that He Who is the Lord of matter as well as the Lord of spirit, has discovered to us His will herein to make the material creature the channel of His spiritual gift; suppose that gift to be the new nature of His Son; and the question to which I have referred is sufficiently answered.

Or, again, How, it is asked, can the Death of our Lord Jesus Christ be properly credited with such extraordinary efficacy as is attributed to it in the New Testament? Certainly, if He Who died on the Cross was only human, it is folly, and worse, to see in His Death the redemption of a guilty world. But if He is Divine, who shall say that the death of that Human Nature which He assumed in time, to be first wounded and slain before it was raised in glory, might not have this or other conceivable and more astonishing results? In the light of this higher wisdom, of Christ's essential Deity, the wisdom of the Redemption is more than justified.

So, again, with questions as to the government of the world. "Had I been God," it was profanely said the other day, "I never would have created a world in which such terrible catastrophes as that earthquake at Ischia were possible."[1] "Had you been God," it might be answered, "you would have at least seen further than you do; you would have known whether high moral excellence is possible among men, apart from the presence of moral evil; whether physical evil and moral evil are not intimately linked to each other, independently of the history of our race; whether a dreadful catastrophe like this at Ischia may not have moral and religious aspects and consequences which do not occur to us on its surface."

[1] The reference is to the great earthquake at Ischia, on July 28th, 1883.

Indeed, the first lesson of true wisdom is the limited nature of our faculties, and the reality and extent of our ignorance.

In St. Paul's day there were minds which thought that the conversion of the heathen and the establishment of a world-wide Church might have been secured at a less cost than that of the reprobation of the great majority of the Jewish people. But the Apostle contents himself with exhibiting the state of the case, without professing to account for it; he exhibits it, and then cries out in admiring wonder, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"[1]

It may be asked whether this justification of the Eternal Wisdom by Her children brings any help to those who, unhappily, do not believe; whether it does not leave them to their fate as if their case was hopeless; whether it does not, moreover, imply that Christianity can only command the homage of hearts which are already, to a certain extent, in secret sympathy with itself.

No, brethren, this would be true if there were no such agency as grace. But as it is, the Eternal Spirit is perpetually moving on the face of the waters of human thought; He is constantly playing round each single soul; He is suggesting, with infinite delicacy and tenderness, those modes of thought, those states of mind, above all, those states of conscience, which constitute the dispositions for faith. Every child of man may become, through the preventive and illuminating grace of God, a child of Wisdom if he will. There is, indeed, no compulsion exerted; we may keep the heavenly influence at bay; we may resolutely elect to remain children sitting in the world's market-place, and repeating its current criticisms upon a sanctity and truth which we do not understand. But this need not

[1] Rom. xi. 33.

be so. If the Christian Church expects her message to be justified only by the children of Wisdom, she sets no limits to their possible number.

There are two practical lessons to be borne in mind.

One is that nothing is so fatal to the recognition of moral and religious truth as a scornful temper. Scornfulness blinds the eye of the soul with fatal completeness. Its telling epigrams, "He hath a devil," "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber," may command a momentary applause, but they are dearly paid for. For the first condition of seeing truth, whether it be moral or intellectual truth, is patience; and a scornful epigram is the petulant rejection of patience; it is an effort to decide a difficult question by a method which assumes that the cry of insolent passion is the verdict of faith or the verdict of reason. Nothing is more certain, whether in the higher or the lower regions of truth, than that the scornful are always shallow. Of the scornful it was said in tears by the Eternal Wisdom, "The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should be converted, and I should heal them."[1]

And, secondly, wisdom may, and must, be won by prayer. It is the first of the seven gifts of that Holy Spirit Whom God the Father gives to those that ask Him. This general body, stock, and spirit of truth, which makes dependent truths plain, and so justifies them to our understandings, this power of insight into saintly character through sympathy with its determining motive,—this is given now as of old to those who sincerely ask for it. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding." "She shall

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 15.

give to thine head an ornament of grace ; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee."[1]

"If thou criest after knowledge,
And liftest up thy voice for understanding ;
If thou seekest her as silver,
And searchest for her as for hid treasures ;
Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord,
And find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord giveth wisdom :
Out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."[2]

[1] Prov. iv. 7-9.

[2] *Ib.* ii. 3-6.

SERMON XI.

WHAT ARE WE WORKING FOR?

St. Luke xii. 20.

Whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

ON the last Sunday in the year many persons are embarrassed by the presence of two different classes of subjects which claim attention. On one side is the great festival of our Lord's Nativity, still in full course (as the collects and the proper preface in the Communion Service remind us), while its teaching is at once perpetuated and varied in the appointed Epistle and Gospel for to-day;[1] and to many good Christians it seems at such a time almost an act of faithlessness to dwell on any truth, however important, which lies further from the heart of the Gospel than does the Birth of the Redeemer into our human world. On the other hand, the last Sunday, almost as much as the last day in the civil year, brings with it serious thoughts to many a man who has not yet learnt to attach their due value to the great truths and lessons which the Christian Church teaches us through the succession of her festivals. And indeed none of us can well fail to feel, as often as we pass one more of these natural landmarks of time, that the question, "What we are doing with our lives," is an almost inevitable question. As we get up in the morning, and say to ourselves —"This is the last Sunday in the year," we can hardly help asking ourselves, however hastily, what use we have

[1] The Sunday after Christmas.

made of the fifty-one Sundays that have preceded it, to say nothing of the intervening days ; we can hardly help whispering each to himself, " I wonder whether I shall be here to see the last Sunday of another year." These questions and reflections do not conflict with the great subject of the Incarnation of God the Son for the sake of raising fallen man, which Christmas brings home to us. Nay, if steadily dwelt upon, they enhance our sense of the overwhelming importance of that great mystery. But they form a subject of themselves, and when life is so short for those who live longest, and its issues so momentous, we cannot do amiss in turning our thoughts towards them at those moments which most naturally suggest them.

The words with which our Lord concludes the parable of the sudden death of the wealthy landlord will assist us in doing this : " Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ? " In order to understand something of the searching and pathetic character of this inquiry, it is necessary to recall the incident out of which the parable that leads up to it arose.

Our Lord had been asked a question, it would seem, not by one of His disciples, but by a man of the crowd, who had probably been listening to Him for the first time in his life, and was deeply impressed by coming into contact with what seemed to him a higher wisdom and a nobler character than any he had encountered before. When we have suddenly conceived a warm admiration for or confidence in a teacher, it is natural to consult him on the subject which lies nearest to our hearts ; and this man was a younger son, who conceived that he had been unjustly deprived by an elder brother of his proper share in their father's estate. Believing that if his brother could only be advised by One Who spoke with such mingled tenderness and authority as our Lord, he must needs obey, the young man asked our Lord to interfere :

"Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me."

Our Lord refused, and on grounds which are at all times, but now perhaps especially, entitled to attention. Spiritual truth belonged to one sphere, civil law to another; and the question of the legal destination or division of an estate was a question of civil law. No doubt it was a question of natural justice too, but it belonged to that sort or department of justice which is inseparable from technical method and special knowledge. As far as our Lord had revealed Himself to the questioner, He was only a Teacher of spiritual truth, and as such He would not encroach on a jurisdiction which belonged by God's appointment to the State; just as He would not recognise the State's right to rule questions of spiritual truth. "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?"

They are momentous words when we look at them in the light of later history; they suggest to us that the Church may have at times, and here or there, attempted to deal with problems beyond her province, and that, as a punishment for such attempts, she may have been debarred by the State, jealous of its independence, from deciding those graver issues which, by the will of her Founder, she only can legitimately decide.

At this moment too, the words offer perhaps another suggestion. The air around us is filled with controversies on the respective rights of labour and capital, and the Christian Church is constantly adjured to be true to her Master, and to bid capital, in this sense or in that, divide its inheritance with labour. Most assuredly in such a controversy the Church cannot stand aside, in an attitude of anything like indifference. She has duties both towards the elder and the younger brother in this controversy. It is her work and her privilege to relieve suffering, so far as she can, wherever it is found, and

however it may have been caused. She must remind capital of the duties of an unselfish care for the bodies and souls of men; and she must remind labour—organised labour—that its best claims upon the attention of capitalised wealth may be fatally weakened by the indulgence of class hatreds or the promotion of vulgar personal ambitions. But beyond this, the clergy at any rate can hardly hope to interfere with advantage; and if they stand aloof it is not necessarily from want of courage, but because as a class they must be conscious of not possessing the special knowledge which is needed for useful interference—for such interference as will procure, not a passing sense of satisfaction and a shout of applause that soon dies away, but the permanent and satisfactory settlement of questions that are in truth vast and intricate. In presence of these questions they may say, with even more reason than the All-wise, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?"

But our Lord's deepest reason for this decision of His not to interfere between the younger son and his elder brother is given in the precept and the parable which He uttered immediately afterwards. The drift of both is the same:—the relative valuelessness of earthly possessions when placed in the light of the true conditions of the life of man. Turning from the young man who had addressed the request to Him to the crowd of listeners and disciples who stood around, He said unto them: "Take heed and beware of all covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." This was a warning to the elder brother, who wished to retain the whole estate; to the younger brother, who was bent on getting a share of the estate; and to the listeners, who probably were thinking that they at any rate had not asked a stranger to interfere in a family quarrel with a view to their personal aggrandisement, while they forgot

that the passion for property which was at the root of the quarrel was not less powerful in their own hearts and characters than elsewhere. Who that knows anything really of himself will dare to say that such a precept is unneeded?

The precept was followed by the parable of the rich man with a productive farm. It is, like that of Dives and Lazarus, one of those parables which look as though our Lord, in uttering them, was thinking of a case in real life which had passed under His eye. A prosperous landowner is embarrassed by his prosperity: he does not know where to store away his abundant crops. He first decides to pull down his barns and build greater: in this way he will secure the produce of his estate. He then asks himself what is to come of this outlay of money and toil. He decides that he had better ensure and enlarge his opportunities for enjoyment. But man proposes and God disposes. He was thinking of many years of pleasure; but it had already been ruled in heaven that his days on earth should end at once. "God said unto him: Thou foolish one, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." And then follows the question, "Whose shall those things be that thou hast provided?"

I.

The object of the parable is to illustrate our Lord's saying that man's true life "consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth." With a view to this it brings vividly before us four considerations.

The first is the embarrassment which wealth, and especially a sudden accession of wealth, may bring to a man who is not under the guidance of high and true principles. People who have not property, or very little of it, are apt to think that if only a fortune was left them they should know very well what to do with it. Whether they would

or not depends upon the question whether their lives are governed by a distinct principle. The principle may be a bad or a good one. No doubt a man whose principles are bad knows very well what he would do with a large sum of money. He would probably spend it in gambling or in profligacy. But the landowner in the parable is not in this sense a bad man: he is a man without any good principle to guide him. Thus his prosperity simply perplexes him. He may have wished for wealth in former days, but now it has come to him he knows not what to do with it. "He thought within himself saying, What shall I do?" "He thought within himself." Had he been accustomed to serve God he would have remembered that this unlooked-for addition to the yearly produce of his estate came from the Author of all goodness; and he would have been sure that a part, or the whole of it, ought to be returned to Him in the shape of aid to some work of religion or of mercy that would best advance His glory; he would have sought guidance in prayer as to the mode in which this acknowledgment of God's bounty might most usefully be made. As it is, he does not see his way. He takes counsel, not with God, not with the wise and thoughtful among his fellow-men, but with his own thoughts. He revolves in his brain scheme after scheme; he is the sport of his own bewildered fancy; he cannot make up his mind; he has more on his hands than he knows how to dispose of. "What shall I do? I have no room where to bestow my fruits."

This landowner belongs to our modern and Western world quite as much as to the ancient East. There are people among us who do not know what to do with their wealth. They are surrounded by persons and objects on which it might be bestowed with the greatest advantage both to the receiver and the giver. Poverty, sickness, education on principles which will make life useful and

death happy, missions to the heathen, the promotion of religious enterprise in any one of its many forms,—these and other claimants stand around the man of property, stretching out their hands for a share in his wealth. But he either does not see, or does not heed, or does not understand them; he is still embarrassed by the very abundance to which he clings: he says within himself, "What shall I do?"

II.

A second consideration follows. Here is an example of the love of property as such, and apart from anything that can be done with it. The landowner's perplexities have come to an end; a sudden resolve has flashed upon his mind. "This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." He has got hold of an idea: the use of property is that he should improve and augment it. "Property"—this is his reflection,—"is an end in itself: and the more you can make it grow, or add to it, the better." The man looks upon his property as in some sense part of himself: his happiness for the time being consists in possessing it, whatever use he may or may not be able to make of it. Observe how he repeats the possessive pronoun: "my fruits," "my barns," "my goods." That is the charm: not only is it property, it is his property. We see this trait of human nature develop itself very early in children: the very young child will often delight mainly in a toy, not simply as curious or beautiful, but as his toy, and not the toy of some other child. The human soul, even as it opens upon life, betrays this singular and deep-seated passion for assimilating something outward and material, for finding its happiness and its glory in making the most of some bits of matter, whether it be a

diamond that is worth millions or a stick picked out of a hedge.

"I will pull down my barns, and build greater; there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." This temper was not peculiar to a Syrian farmer or landowner. The Roman poet[1] saw the same thing going on in the capital of the world. He has vividly described the man who applauded himself each time that he looked steadily at the money which he had hoarded in his strong-box. And I suppose we all of us have known cases in which fortunes have been accumulated by the simple process of investing year by year in new securities the entire surplus of income that was not wanted for personal expenses or for the cost of a household. In this manner fortunes may grow quickly, and as they grow, they become the object of a more passionate solicitude.

Once more the service of God and the service of man urge their claims; the poor, the sick, the heathen, the neglected, the uneducated young, the hospital, the Church,—all urge their claims. But it is all to no purpose. For the time being, this man of property has only one object, the accumulation of property as an end in itself, and to this all else must give way.

III.

But here a third consideration presents itself. There is that in the human soul, even when most forgetful of its true destiny as a spirit created to know, love, and enjoy its God to all eternity,—there is that in the human soul which refuses to take pleasure for ever in the mere handling money or any sort of matter, as a thing to be rejoiced in for its own sake. If the soul does not yet know the true object of its existence, it at least looks out for

[1] Horace, II. *Ep.* i. 175.

something beyond material possessions, something which those possessions shall bring. Property must not merely exist to be possessed; it must do something: it must minister to its possessor something beyond itself; and if it is not made to subserve the cause of goodness, or the cause of knowledge, then it must furnish amusement and pleasure. So the landowner said unto his soul: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Here, again, this idea of the object and use of property does not belong only to the ancient world. No doubt that old world knew how to spend fortunes upon amusement, after one fashion in the East and after another in the West. Under the Empire, not only did the wealthy classes spend enormous sums upon their baths, their villas, their gardens, their troops of slaves, their importations of all that the art and luxury of the East could furnish them, but the mass of the people too, demanded amusement from their rulers, if they were to be kept in good temper. "Bread and the public games!" that was the cry: and woe to the Emperor who persistently neglected it. But the idea that the real use of money is to minister to pleasure and amusement is common enough among Christians to-day: and they are so far worse than the old Pagan rulers at Rome, that instead of furnishing pleasures to those who cannot pay for them, they often reflect with satisfaction that their enjoyments are a distinction, since they are not shared by anybody else. Doubtless a certain expenditure is inevitable in certain stations of life; but this does not warrant the race in ostentation and luxury which characterises some sections of modern society, or the outlay of vast sums of money on mere self-gratification, or in the effort to achieve a social success. There are, indeed, wealthy people among us whose expenditure is as much a matter of conscience as if they had the greatest

difficulty in making both ends meet. But what sums are expended upon equipages, dresses, household decorations and furniture, theatres,—sums that would go far, if properly applied, to renew the face of the earth, economically, socially, and religiously! Certainly our modern expenditure upon pleasure is enormous; but, after all, what is pleasure? One of the ablest of the ancients describes it as "a correspondence between a faculty and its object." But what if the faculty is surfeited, or enfeebled, or in a way to wear out? Expenditure can command the objects of enjoyment, but it cannot ensure that the power to enjoy shall last. It cannot make the senses for ever fresh and quick; it cannot make the most prized and costly entertainments for ever welcome. A time comes when, as the Preacher says, "desire," or the artificial stimulant which quickens desire, "shall fail";[1] and then pleasure dies away with the gradually decaying senses into the dim background of waning memory. Nor can we be sure that time will be allowed for this gradual process of disillusion; the project of indefinite enjoyment may be abruptly cut short.

IV.

And thus we arrive at a fourth consideration which the parable presents. The whole scheme of indefinite enjoyment may collapse. No man has a right to presume upon the future. "God said, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." At this point, probably, somebody is already saying to himself, "Here we are to have the old commonplace about the uncertainty of life." Undoubtedly; and a very important commonplace it is. Do not fall into the vulgar mistake of turning a truth of vital importance out of your minds for no better reason than because it is a commonplace. Why is it a commonplace? Why is any great, certain, solemn fact a commonplace,

[1] Ecclesiastes xii. 5.

but because, while it cannot be disputed, it is too solemn to be neglected, and therefore has been in all ages at once accepted and discussed? Poor and false indeed would be our thoughts about truth and life if we were to dismiss from them all truths that have attracted the common thought and speech of mankind; we should too surely thus leave out of account that which it most concerns us to take to our hearts. Doubtless the uncertainty of life is a commonplace, but it is one which we can least afford to set aside, while we are all too ready to do so.

Look around you, each within the circuit of his own experience, and see if you do not recognise the picture in the parable:—an indolent epicureanism which whispers to itself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," broken in upon by some message flashed from heaven. It comes,—that message,—in a railway accident, or a sinking packet-boat, by a death in the hunting field, or by the sudden stoppage of the heart's action: "Thou fool, this hour thy soul shall be required of thee." No; whatever other truths may be assailed in an age of scepticism, no sceptic has yet questioned the uncertainty of life. Whatever other dangers may be warded off or lessened by science, no discoverer has yet told us how we may certainly keep out of the grave, or provide against the hundred contingencies which may hurry us into it. At any moment the catastrophe may come which parts the landowner from his barns and goods and enjoyments as completely as if he had never been in contact with them for a single moment. And thus there remains the question, as put by our Lord, "The things that thou hast provided, whose shall they be?" Even the light-hearted Horace is grave at the tomb; "all," he says, "is left behind, save the cypress that stands beside it."[1] As the Psalmist says of a wealthy man of the world,

[1] Horace, *Ep.* v. 18.

"He shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth, neither shall his pomp follow him."[1]

"Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Whose, indeed? How constantly are all the provisions of a will defeated by one or two deaths! A fortune, accumulated by the toil of years, is left to children to be a legacy of unhappiness; to suggest fictitious wants which have nothing to do with real comfort; to be consumed in law expenses undertaken to decide whose, after all, the larger part shall be; to be spent in debauchery, or alienated for the payment of heavy debts,—if, indeed, it does not quickly devolve on distant heirs-at-law, who have no more feeling of gratitude for the maker of their fortunes than they entertain towards the cattle whose flesh they eat, or the field which supplies them with bread, if indeed—it is not an imaginary case—they do not reflect that he is well out of the way, and proceed accordingly to traverse his cherished wishes, or insult his memory.

A vital question for all of us is, What is my idea of property? Is property something which I must inevitably leave behind me when I die? Or is it something which may be interwoven with the very texture of my immortal nature, and so will last me for eternity? Money, jewels, lands, houses, decorations of all sorts and kinds, must be taken leave of on the bed of death; even the trifling object which affection has cherished for a lifetime —a book or a likeness—must be left behind. But there are things which last. Habits wrought into the intellect and the will, love of God and man, sincerity, purity, disinterestedness—these things live. They are really property. Death cannot touch them; they are among the treasures in heaven, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal."

[1] Ps. xlix. 17.

Let us consider one or two practical bearings of this truth.

1. What would probably be the reply of four out of every five men whom you meet in the street if suddenly asked what they understood to be meant by a true civilisation? Would they not say that civilisation is such a manipulation of the materials and forces of the natural world around us as enables man to make the most of it; that nations are civilised or uncivilised in the degree in which they do or do not possess this mastery over nature, and the knowledge which enables them to assert and to maintain it, and the social and political order which are essential to its safety? The railway, the gasometer, the electric light, the electric telegraph, the telephone, efficient protection by police and fleets and armies—these are the most splendid, as they are the most recent, triumphs of our civilisation; they add a new lustre to the idea of civilisation which we learnt from the great constructions and from the artistic triumphs of antiquity.

What is this but the principle of the landlord in the parable? "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." Surely such an idea of civilisation, of true human improvement, is a libel upon human nature. True human improvement must be the improvement of man himself, and not of anything outside man. And what is man himself? Not anything that he owns; not anything material that he can so handle as to make it serve his purpose; not even the bodily frame from which he will part company at death (though only to resume it at a later stage of his existence). Essentially, man is a spirit, enclosed in a bodily form; his spiritual essence links him to the orders of the heavenly intelligences above him, as his body connects him with the animal world beneath him. His real improvement consists in that

which secures the freedom and supremacy of the noblest part of his nature, the exercise of his understanding on the highest truth, the devotion of his affections to the highest beauty, the obedience of his will to the perfect law. A true civilisation is that which promotes these results on a great scale in human society; and a material civilisation, however highly developed, which does not promote them is not a true or adequate civilisation. We learn from history and from experience that man in his very triumphs over matter may degrade himself; that material improvement, whether in a man or in a people, may go hand in hand with human degradation; matter may establish an empire over the spirit of the being whose own hand has subdued it. This is not to say that true civilisation has nothing to do with the external conditions of man's life. It is indisputable that a due attention to these conditions, a certain measure of material civilisation, is of great importance. Just as in the life of the individual man a certain measure of bodily health and strength is needed for the due exercise of the mental and moral faculties, while corpulence threatens them in more ways than one, so it is with societies of men. A true human civilisation is a moral, even more than a mental,—ay, it is a spiritual civilisation, and it is attained when man's material progress has reached the exact point at which it affords the greatest assistance, and offers the least obstructions to that mental and moral growth in which the excellence of man himself, as distinct from that of anything outside him, pre-eminently consists.

2. Or consider how much healthier would be the condition of human society than it actually is if our Lord's teaching in the parable could be frankly accepted. How different would be the temper of that majority of men who, arrange and re-arrange property as we may, will never possess an equal share with others of material goods, if

only for the reason that they or their parents are born into the world with unequal faculties for production. But also, how different, how unspeakably happier, would be the lives of those who do possess, or who hope to possess, large wealth! To take one illustration out of many. What do we see every year, as the London season draws near, but a bevy of mothers, like generals setting out on a campaign, prepared to undergo any amount of fatigue, if only they may marry their daughters—not necessarily to a high-souled, virtuous man—but in any case to a fortune? What do we see but a group of young men thinking, after perhaps a career of dissipation, that the time has arrived for settling respectably in life, looking out, each of them, not for a girl who has the graces and character which will make her husband and her children happy, but for one who has a sufficient dowry to enable him to keep up a large establishment? Who can wonder, when the most sacred of all human relations, the union of two hearts for time and eternity, is thus prostituted to the brute level of an affair of cash, that such transactions are quickly followed by months or years of misery,—misery which, after seething in private, is at last paraded before the eyes of the world, amid the unspeakable shame and degradation of the Divorce Court? Ah! we think that the dangers to existing social life are to be found only elsewhere,—in the changing physical conditions of man's existence, in the new relations between labour and capital, in organised strikes and disorderly mobs, which threaten, more or less remotely, serious revolution. I do not make light of all this; but, let us depend on it, our worst dangers are nearer home.

Here then is a practical subject for reflection on the last Sunday in the year. Go home and read through, on your knees, our Lord's parable of the prosperous landowner and his sudden death. Ask yourselves, each one,—"What am I doing with the life which God has given me?

What am I doing with those surroundings of it which I call mine, but which I only have in trust for a very few years, which I cannot possibly take away with me, and for my management of which I must give an account? What am I doing with that spiritual essence which is my very self, and which will live, whether I will or not, in woe or in bliss throughout eternity?" As we ask ourselves these questions, there passes, on a day like this, before our eyes, the procession of the dead—who were among us this day a year ago, and have gone before us into the world unseen. There they pass,—the great popular statesman,[1] the aged relative of the Sovereign,[2] the venerable peer so long and so intimately associated with this city,[3] the saintly martyr of charity who has thrilled us all with a higher sense of duty,[4] the great poet who is to be laid in the Abbey on Tuesday,[5] and the great Bishop and scholar who lingered among us until a week ago, and was buried among the flock he ruled and loved so well the day before yesterday.[6] There they pass, and with them many another, less known to fame, but whom we have known and loved.

> "Where are they now? O hidden blest repose!
> So thin the veil by your retirement worn,
> We too may be with you ere evening's close.
> . . . . . .
> Whether they sleep beyond the western bourne,
> Or on the precincts of our being lie,
> They are the outgoings of the eternal morn
> Which shall be borne on wings of Deity,
> Like clouds that burn with gold, kindling the eastern sky."[7]

There they pass; and what do they, what would they say to us? "Do not," they urge, "make a mistake as to that in which your true life consists, or prefer the material to the spiritual, or postpone the eternal to the things of

[1] Mr. John Bright.
[2] H.R.H. the Duchess of Cambridge.
[3] Lord Addington.
[4] Father Damien.
[5] Robert Browning.
[6] Dr. Lightfoot, Bishop of Durham.
[7] Isaac Williams, *Creation*, p. 378.

time. It was to teach you the awfulness and the greatness of your true life that the Highest laid aside His glory and was born into your little world of sin and shadows. Lay hold then on His strength and pardon, that you may possess that of which nothing can deprive you—His own lasting presence, His very self."

SERMON XII.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

St. Luke xvi. 1, 2.

There was a certain rich man which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

IT has been suggested that this is one of the parables in which our Lord adapted the circumstances of a real occurrence to the purposes of His public teaching. Just as it is probable that the unjust Judge who granted the prayer of the importunate widow was a legal official who really lived in Palestine in our Lord's time, so His language might seem to imply that the lord and the steward in to-day's[1] Gospel were real personages, and that the circumstances under which the steward was dismissed, and the means he adopted to save himself from ruin, were topics of public conversation. If this was indeed the case, it would have made the illustration much more vivid and effective for those of His hearers who had heard of the circumstances. While it accounts for the parable taking this particular form, it shows that our Lord is relating what had occurred simply for one particular object,—and without at all meaning to imply that He approved of the steward's proceedings as a whole.

The history simply was this. The steward was accused to the owner of the property of culpable wastefulness; and

[1] *i.e.* The Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

dismissal from his post meant for him nothing less than ruin. As he could not escape dismissal, the question arose how to provide for the future. He was unaccustomed to hard manual labour: "I cannot dig," he said. He was too proud to trust to alms for his livelihood: "To beg I am ashamed." It occurred to him that he might make friends of the tenants who farmed his master's property, by falsifying their accounts in such a manner as to lessen his master's receipts, by one-fifth in one case, by one-half in another. The grateful tenants, he trusted, would remember their friend when he was no longer able to help them or to support himself. He had a legal right to do this, although he certainly had not a moral right; it was legally within his competence to determine the rental of the estate; it was morally wrong in him to injure his lord for his own purposes. Of course, what he had done became known to his lord; and here occurs what I may call the surprise of the parable. We should have expected that the owner would have been more angry than ever when he found that he had been not merely injured through the carelessness of his agent, but virtually cheated on a large scale. So, no doubt, it would have been with any English landlord; but we are told that the lord in the parable commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely. And this is what we might have expected in the East. The Oriental mind is not so much struck by the rightfulness or wrongful character of an act, as by its audacity, its success, its splendour, whether as a triumph of force or a triumph of cunning. If the lord in the parable was not ruined by the clever rascality of the steward, he would, as an Eastern, have admired it, because it was so artful and so audacious. And it is this touch in the story, among others, which leads some critics to believe that it was a real, and not an imaginary history, related by our Lord for the particular purpose which He had in hand.

But does our Lord then approve of the steward's proceedings as a whole? It would be a great mistake to suppose this. Our Lord only records the commendation of the landlord; and that commendation was given on one particular ground,—the steward's prudence. The landlord does not commend the steward for the way in which his prudence showed itself in detail, but for his "doing wisely" in making provision against an uncertain future. And our Lord, repeating the history, is careful to imply that it is only in this quality of practical foresight that the steward was at all commendable: there is not one word said to imply even indifference to his way of showing it. Rather, our Lord is careful to say that the prudence which He advises is practically very different from that of the steward. The "children of this world," the class to which the steward belongs, are sharply contrasted with "the children of light," His own disciples and worshippers. The prudence of the children of this world, it is implied, shows itself in one way, the prudence of the children of light in another. Only the quality of prudence or foresight is common to the two classes. And in their way, our Lord says, the children of this world are the more prudent of the two.

The point of the narrative, then, is the necessity of prudence in matters which touch the soul. In what does this prudence consist? It consists in practically recognising two most certain and obvious truths.

I.

Of these, the first is, that every human being is simply a trustee. We are the administrators of an estate which belongs to another. From the Queen upon her throne down to the poorest of her subjects, this law holds good: properly speaking there is no such thing as human owner-

ship; we hold what we hold on trust, as life-tenants, for an unseen Lord. This truth might seem too plain to require much insisting on. Nothing that we have, nothing that we are, comes from ourselves. If we possess anything, we have either inherited it or earned it. If we have inherited it, it was not we who gave life, energy, power to those who have bequeathed to us what we have. If we have earned it, it was not we who gave ourselves the active brain, the strong arm and nerve that did the work. At the most we have improved, made the most of, a gift. Our powers, moral and intellectual, physical and spiritual, come from the Author of our life; our life itself is a gift. "It is God Who hath made us, and not we ourselves." We do not exist as of right; we exist on sufferance, and as a matter of bounty. We are stewards, not only of our outward possessions, but of the very powers of our being: not merely of what we have, but of what we are. And yet how little do the majority of men master this most elementary truth! Do we not speak as if we existed in our own right: as if God was bound, first, to make us what we are, and then, secondly, to give us what we have; as if now we had claims upon Him, and rights against Him, such as might belong to an independent and self-supporting position in the universe? Or do we not complain that He should have done so much, if indeed we consent to put it in this way, and not have done more: that being what we are, we should not have more than we have: the fundamental idea being that no one has really in hard justice, as distinct from a matter of sentiment, any claims upon us; that we are not indebted to God in any such sense as to cease, as far as He is concerned, to be independent? We transfer the privileges secured to us by human law to our relations with the Most High God; we do not really think of ourselves as tenants or stewards; we are here, we conceive, in our own right; and if we said out what we think, we should

say this,—that as He has His kingdom, His rights, in heaven, so have we ours, on a smaller scale, on earth,—rights parallel to His, in their substantive character, in their independence of all interference, in their superiority to all appeal.

Certainly there are some possessions in which the conditions of human society oblige men who do not seriously believe in God as Maker and Owner of the universe, to admit other rights than their own. This, *e.g.*, is the case with landed property. Landed property, it is often said, has its responsibilities. It cannot be regarded on any theory as simply the possession of the owner to do what he will with: he holds it, not simply in his own right, but in trust for the nation, in trust for the poor, and his rights over it are traversed by serious liabilities. He has to remember that his land is naturally intended to support a certain population: and this original intention is not set aside because this population is, in the law's eye, his tenantry, and so removeable at his will. If he were to push his rights to the point of clearing his acres of cottages, and driving the poor into the narrow streets of some adjacent town, in order to raise his income by diminishing the rates, he would be condemned by the conscience of the country, which regards him partly, no doubt, as an owner in his own right, but also in a certain sense as a trustee for the national benefit. This doctrine may, of course, as we all know, easily be pushed to excesses which really destroy the idea of property,—that is to say, one of the fundamental ideas of moral truth altogether. But no truth is therefore false, because it may be exaggerated: and nothing is more certain than that the continued security of landed property in this country depends upon a generous admission of its immense, and, I will add, its natural, responsibilities on the part of landowners.

But, in truth, what we all recognise in the case of landed property is morally true of property of all kinds. We are not the less trustees because we have what we have in more obscure investments, in the funds, in foreign funds, in nobody knows what funds; because nobody knows what we have, and there are no human beings ready to make claims upon us. Whatever we have is given us to hold in trust, given us to administer in the fear of God, and with an eye to His glory; and the moment we lose sight of this we begin to waste the goods which are not ours but His.

The waste of God's goods by His human stewards is one of the sad mysteries of the moral world. It keeps pace with God's bounty, just as the activities of evil generally keep pace with God's active goodness, and the activities of falsehood with His illuminating Truth. The waste of property is the form of waste which appeals most strongly to the eye and the imagination. The young heir who ruins an old family estate by the extravagances of the race-course or of the gambling-table, points the moral of many a tale; but property may be wasted in less brilliantly ostentatious ways than that, yet wasted just as surely. The man who spends what he has always upon himself, however decorously and prudently, wastes it. The man who hoards what he has, as if money had a virtue inherent in itself and could be kept by its owner for ever, wastes it. The man who does not make a conscience of consecrating what he has, by giving one-tenth of it, or at least some fixed proportion, to God, wastes it. He wastes it for this reason, that whatever he does with it, he does not treat it as God's property, lent to him for a certain time, to be used for God's glory, to be accounted for at the foot of God's throne, but as, in a real sense, his own; and this fundamental misapprehension enters into, discolours, warps, vitiates, every use he makes of it. No one of his

applications of what he has involves a confession that he is only administering what belongs to another.

The waste of mental ability, whether it be of the highest gift, genius, or of lower gifts, talent, sagacity, insight, taste, memory, is not less common than waste of money. Yet many a man who recognises his responsibility in respect of his income, has no idea that any use he may make of mental power can be wasteful. To let it lie idle altogether,—that, he grants, would be wasteful. But, having sharpened his wits by education, he sincerely believes himself free to do what he likes with them. So he writes in some clever newspaper or serial, not with any moral aim whatever, but to create a sensation, to achieve a reputation, and, as a consequence, without any careful regard to what he knows, or might know, of truth. All that fertility and resource, all that penetration and sagacity, that charm of language, those flashes, it may be, of genius, are wasted: they do nothing for the glory of God, nothing for the improvement, the progress, the peace of any one human soul. Talent, like income, is given us for one supreme end, to be pursued in and through all lesser ends,—for God's glory, so far as we know how to advance it. To lose sight of this is to waste the gift.

Then there is the waste of influence,—of that power of guiding others and of doing them good, which comes in an eminent degree with wealth, or ability, or high position. How easily this may be wasted through indolence, or through timidity, or through thinking more of popularity than of truth,—of what will please than of what will do lasting good,—we see on all sides of us. Fathers of families, masters of large establishments, holders of public offices, magistrates, statesmen, clergymen, and especially bishops and archbishops, have, by the mere fact of their position, a great account to give. All who depend on them, all who might be reached by them, all the good that they might

do, all the mischief that they might prevent, falls within their stewardship.

Far more serious than the waste of either money or talent is the waste of grace. We do not see the invisible grace of God; it does not tell for so much in public life or in society as do property or ability; and therefore, walking, as so many of us do, by sight and experience and not by faith, we think less of it. But, in reality, the graces which God gives us through the mediation of His Blessed Son and the agency of His Spirit are incomparably more precious than our money or our talents. They have cost more, and they can do more. They were earned by the Blood of the Eternal Son freely shed for us upon the Cross of shame. They touch not our material but our immaterial life; not that which only belongs to us, but our real selves; not this world merely, but the next, —and the next especially. How piteous is the waste of opportunities of prayer, opportunities of instruction, opportunities, above all, of receiving the Holy Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood, which we see on all sides of us! Opportunities, let us observe, are morally possessions: they are ours to make the most of or to neglect; they must be either used or neglected, and after neglecting them, as after using them, we are not the men we were. Of all such opportunities we are stewards, and what that stewardship means we shall only know fully hereafter.

And, incidentally, in wasting money, talents, graces, we waste two other goods which must be accounted for;— health and time. Nothing is more common in the world than to hear invalids make the remark that "no man knows the value of sound health until he has lost it." But how often does it happen that men only discover the real meaning of life, its high purpose, its dreadful risks, its splendid opportunities, its blessings and its solemnities, when they are stretched on a bed of sickness! Sickness,

indeed, may be a good of which a man is a steward. "I would not for all the world," said a great sufferer who had led a careless life, "have suffered one less pang than I have during the last five months." But health, with its buoyancy, its strength, its spirits, its capacity for work, for endurance, for active and passive triumphs over what is false or wrong, is God's best temporal gift. And time, which inevitably is wasted or used, as we use or waste other things,—time, which passing once never returns,—time, which is charged, every hour of it, with irrevocable opportunities,—time, which, as a great Christian said, should be made the most of, moment by moment, just as men sip a liqueur drop by drop:—how grave and solemn a stewardship does it involve for all of us!

Brethren, no human life is wasted unperceived, or wasted with impunity. As the waste proceeds it is observed and registered. As the waste proceeds on earth, the solemn accusation is pleaded to the Lord of life in the court of heaven. He Who sees all sees the waste. "There is no creature," says an Apostle, "that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do."[1] Abel's blood pleaded to Him from the ground.[2] Israel's cry by reason of their taskmasters entered into His ears.[3] He hears the cry of the poor destitute, says the Psalmist.[4] The hire of the labourers, says St. James, who had reaped down the fields of the rich in Judæa, and which was by them kept back by fraud, cried aloud to Him.[5] Wastefulness, like sin, by its very existence accuses the unjust steward to the Lord of life. And the accusation is sustained by that evil spirit whose commonest name in the New Testament means the "Accuser of the brethren"; who, as he accused holy Job falsely, is eager to accuse before

[1] Heb. iv. 13. [2] Gen. iv. 10. [3] Exod. ii. 23.
[4] Ps. cii. 17, [5] St. James v. 4.

God his own most devoted clients. And when life has been wasted, sooner or later conscience echoes the accusation of Satan, the Judgment of God. When our Lord said to the Scribes and Pharisees that the man among them who was without sin had better cast the first stone at the woman who was taken in adultery, they went out, conscience-stricken, one by one. And if He were to bid the man among us who could lay his hand on his heart and say that he had not consciously wasted money or time or intellect or influence or the means of grace, to sit in judgment on his brethren, we too, probably, my brethren, one by one, should move silently out at yonder door of this cathedral. We should feel, when face to face with truth, that we had been guilty, on a large or a small scale, of the steward's offence—that we had wasted the goods of God.

And this leads to a second point.

II.

We shall have to answer for our trust. Sooner or later it will be said to each of us—to the most faithful and to the least—"Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

When great responsibilities have been abused, God withdraws His gifts. He does not necessarily withdraw life. The literary man who has written only for effect, and sensationally, who has sacrificed virtue, truth, high principle to popularity, in the pages of a magazine or a journal, suddenly loses his sight or loses his employment. The man of property who has had no higher idea of using his income than that of increasing it or spending it on himself, suddenly finds that he has made a bad investment, and that he is a pauper. The man of wide moral or social intellectual influence, who has rejoiced in influ-

ence, not as a means of doing good, but as a gratification of his selfish love of power, lives to see it collapse as if it had never existed; and a name which was once able to stir the minds of men to the very depths becomes a byword for social and moral impotence. Now and then there is, as it were, a pause in the history of the world, and nations fold their hands and wait breathlessly to see the public withdrawal of a great endowment, not by death, but, as we term it, by the force of events. Five times within the present century it has been said to the successive masters of France, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." And King Solomon, of whom to-day's proper lessons are so full, was called in this way to account for his stewardship in Israel. He had abused his unrivalled position, his rare and splendid gifts, by marrying idolatrous princesses and listening to their counsels. So great a fall might well have been punished with swift severity; but, in fact, Solomon was humbled, yet spared. The adversaries whose successes darkened his later life left him time for reviewing the past, and we may hope that he did not neglect the opportunity, or use it in vain. It is in mercy when God thus withdraws His gifts, leaving time for thought, time for repentance, time for giving what is still ours to give—resolution, sincerity, love,—even if the neglects of the past are beyond repair. In view of the last account it may be better to end life at St. Helena than at the Tuileries; all is not ended, religiously speaking, until death.

But the call to account for a waste of God's goods is not always of this kind. Men are summoned, not to some life of retirement, in which they may prepare by penitence and reflection for the last awful scrutiny,—in which they may plead, and not in vain, the Eternal Mercy manifested in the Crucified Son of God; they are sum-

moned, without warning, without an interval, to appear before the throne of Christ. As we have been reminded of late, these swift, momentary passages from all the busy energy and feverish excitement of our earthly life to the stillness of that awful Presence-Chamber are not things of yesterday; nor are they confined to those who follow dangerous employments on the sea, or beneath the surface of the soil: they may be the lot of any one of us. You have only to be sitting in the last carriages of a railway train which become detached from the rest, nobody knows how, as it rushes at night through a station; you may be cantering on your horse at a quiet trot talking to a friend, and slip from your saddle—it is scarcely possible to say why—and all may be over: the chasm which parts time and eternity may have been passed. Not that I would be understood to imply that a sudden death has necessarily something about it of a penal character; that it is always an arrest of Justice—that it never can be the act of a tender and provident Love. Everything really depends upon this: whether those who are so summoned have been living in the thought of death or not. It is impossible here not to think of that great and gifted prelate[1] who, a short month since, was administering so vast a stewardship in this Church and country,—one of the greatest in point of influence that has been intrusted to any Englishman, whether layman or Churchman, in this generation; incomparably the greatest in all but merely official precedence among those intrusted to the living rulers of the English Church. Well, it is a comfort to know that he lived habitually in the thought of death; that he expressed,—more than once to myself,—his expectation that each railway journey might be his last; that when a friend, on one day in last May, was

[1] Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Winchester, was killed by a fall from his horse, July 19th, 1873.

speculating with him upon a probable appointment to a bishopric, he said suddenly, "Probably I shall make the vacancy." Those who knew him only in his public capacity would hardly have supposed that he carried this constant anticipation of the coming account into all those various and exhausting forms of active exertion which made his career at once so productive and so brilliant; yet so, beyond a doubt, it was. And now that he is gone,—now that those lips, eloquent for nearly half a century, have closed for ever in the silence of the grave,—now that those mighty powers of thought and work and government and organisation are no longer here to inspire jealousy or apprehension; there rises around his grave a chorus of encomium which affirms with one voice that he, beyond all other men of our time, has taught his brethren what the stewardship committed to an English bishop may mean in the way of indefatigable exertion. And yet as these deserved acknowledgments are echoed on all sides of us, and while men discuss how best they shall enshrine his memory in some scheme or institution that shall perpetuate it visibly into the coming time, it is impossible not to ask ourselves: Where the while is he, the real, still living man, with that keen, inquisitive, practical intellect, with that tender and most affectionate heart, with those wide sympathies, with that living energetic presence which made itself felt by all whether they would or no? It matters little to him, I apprehend, what we say or do in his memory here, now that he has seen the everlasting realities; now that, at the particular judgment, he has passed the threshold of that world to which we all are hurrying on; now that he has gazed—as a spirit may gaze—upon the Face of Christ. If he could speak he would surely say to us, what his life said so eloquently, what his death implied so solemnly: "Be you who you may, you are stewards on God's property,

and the one thing to live for is the account which you must give of that inalienable, that momentous trust."

It was once said that public men may be divided into two classes: those who do believe in the Day of Judgment, and those who do not. What was meant was that in all the language and actions of a public man you might trace the presence or absence of that sense of responsibility which this belief involves;—this tremendous belief in life and work and talents and position as a stewardship for which account must most certainly be rendered. The observation is not only true of public men, it is true of all of us. We all of us, the humblest, the youngest, the least influential, have our stewardships. Be they great or small in the eye of the world, each man's stewardship must be to himself unspeakably great, since on his discharge of its responsibilities all depends. Our business is, in our Lord's words, to make friends to ourselves of the mammon of unrighteousness; to turn the wealth, the powers, the opportunities which might only minister to our ruin, into so many occasions of promoting the glory of God, and so of promoting our own eternal peace. All will soon be over for those of us who live longest; all will be over very soon for the great majority. It is in the thought of death, and of the account which follows it, that we learn to take healthy views of life; healthy, and therefore stern, views of sin; healthy, and therefore moderate, views of the real worth of the world's opinion; healthy, and therefore exacting, views of the unspeakable value of the soul. Do not let us deceive ourselves; life is not an ownership in our own right, but a stewardship, for every act of which account must be rendered. And if we would claim that indulgent mercy which we all of us must need, we can only do so by the prudence, the honesty, the humility, the courage, which dares to ascertain, now and here, in detail as well as on the whole, how much we need it.

SERMON XIII.

PRUDENCE IN RELIGION.

St. Luke xvi. 8.

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.

THIS is a sentence which must at first strike the less careful reader of the Gospels as strange, and even paradoxical; especially when it is considered Who utters it. And the history of the interpretation of this parable proves that its difficulty has been felt in successive ages of the Church; while yet its main lesson is so plain, and of such practical, or rather, vital importance to all of us, that we cannot do better than follow the Church's guidance in to-day's[1] Gospel and endeavour to consider it.

It is important to bear in mind that the parable was addressed to disciples who had come to our Lord from among the wealthier publicans, and who did not yet understand how to use the goods of this world so as to make them a means of preparing for another. To these men our Lord tells the story of a rich landowner, whose estates were managed by a steward. This steward,—like the overseers of cotton plantations in a past generation, or like many agents on Irish properties at the present day,—was intrusted with a very large discretion. Not only did he superintend the hands employed on the estate and the various methods of turning its resources to account, but he also carried the produce thus obtained into a market of

[1] The Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

his own selection, and disposed of it as his own judgment might dictate. In short, he had simply to do the best he could for his master; but he might do it in his own way. By and by reports reached the landowner to the effect that the steward had mismanaged his estate; "that he had wasted his goods." The steward's fault had been, so far, that lower and more common form of dishonesty, which consists in dealing recklessly or carelessly with another man's property, as distinct from the graver form of dishonesty which consists in deliberately enriching ourselves with that which does not belong to us. Still, a steward who was dishonest in the lower sense was not a good manager of a distant property, and, accordingly, the landowner discharged him from the post. "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." To the steward this dismissal meant starvation: and our Lord describes his soliloquy when he heard that it was resolved on. First, he brings himself vividly to realise the simple fact that ruin is staring him in the face. "What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship." Next he thinks over possible methods of extricating himself; and the more he thinks about them, the more desperate does his case appear to be. He cannot turn day-labourer: the formed habits of a soft and idle life make it impracticable to begin now to earn his bread by hard manual work. To beg for alms from door to door is more than he can stoop to, after all these years of comfort and luxury and social consideration passed in a house of his own. "I am not strong enough to dig," he says; "to beg I am ashamed." But an idea suddenly strikes him; he sees daylight on the horizon: his practised astuteness suddenly discovers a plan of escape. "I am resolved," he says to himself, "what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses." He summons a meeting of tradesmen or

merchants who had made purchases of oil and wheat,—dry and liquid products of the soil of his master's estate,—and who had not paid for their goods at the time, but had given him a note of hand as a security for payment. These notes the steward now returns to the tradesmen, one after another, bidding each correct his bill by substituting a lower figure to describe the amount he had purchased than that which would describe what he had actually received. The steward does not in any case remit the whole sum owed to his master; he does not wish his friends to be too independent, or to be without debt enough to remind them of what had been done for them in remitting the rest. Nor does he remit the same proportion of debt in all cases; it is fifty per cent. in one case, twenty per cent. in another. This difference, which seems at first sight to be without a reason, is a matter of nice, almost artistic, calculation. It will convince the debtors that, although he is on the point of surrendering his office, the steward is not carried away by strong temper or impulse; that he is just as cool a man of business, just as attentive to detail, just as discriminating and judicial as ever. And then each of the debtors will feel that he owes something to a liberality which wins his confidence because it is to all appearance exercised with such painstaking and careful judgment. "He said unto the first debtor, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly"—quickly, for the landlord may come in at any moment—"and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said, Take thy bill, and write fourscore." Of course, the discovery follows; and then the landowner, instead of condemning and punishing the steward for being lavish with that which he had no right to give in order that he might turn the resulting gratitude

of the debtors to his own profit in the future, actually commends him. "The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done prudently." That is the paradox immediately before us; and it suggests two main lessons which we will consider in order.

I.

Now, first, the words remind us how intricately mixed up with each other are virtues and vices, good and evil, in this human world. We often use language which may imply that it is otherwise; we speak of good men and bad men, meaning wholly good or wholly bad, instead of good or bad upon the whole, and in the general purpose and direction of life. But in fact no bad man is without some redeeming quality; and no good man who is merely man, is without some taint or defect that mars the harmony and soils the whiteness of character. I say no good man who is merely man. For we may not forget that One in human form has walked in this our world Whom the most implacable criticism could not convince of any sin; One within Whom the fiery darts of the tempter found no sympathetic element whatever on which to fix the poison of sin;—the sinless Example, the sinless Victim, Who, had He been less than sinless, would neither have washed out with His cleansing blood the stains of human sin, nor shown what humanity may be, and what it is, in the idea and purpose of God. One such there is, but only One. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way."[1] All other human characters,—the saintliest and best, and the worst and most degraded,—are mixed. In the best men there is something to regret; in the worst something to admire and imitate. What, for instance, can be worse than the general conduct of this steward? He is treated with generous confidence

[1] Isa. liii. 6.

by his employer; and he is guilty, first, of a carelessness in dealing with his master's property which amounts to a breach of trust; and, next, of a deliberate effort to gain credit for personal generosity, and to make provision for his own future by falsifying bonds in his keeping which represented debts due to his master. The man's moral nature, we say, must have utterly broken down before such conduct could have been possible. And yet our Lord espies an excellence glittering in this moral darkness. He puts forth His hand, and He isolates from the corruption which surrounds it in the steward's character, and lifts up on high that it may be admired and copied in Christendom to the end of time, a single virtue,—the virtue of prudence. There it lay like a diamond in the mud, which the coarse and undiscriminating condemnation of our ruder estimate would have too surely overlooked; there it lay intimately associated with gross and deliberate fraud;—and yet "the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely."

We have,—to omit other instances,—a striking sample of a mixed character in David. There are dark shadows in David's character. He was, as we know, on one critical occasion guilty in succession of adultery and murder; but he was also at other times vindictive and even treacherous, so as, superficially speaking, to contrast almost disadvantageously with Saul, and certainly with Jonathan. And yet David is "the man after God's own heart," and as such, while others disappear from the scene, he is chosen, and crowned, and preserved amid increasing dangers on his throne as the great ruler of Israel and the moulder of its destinies. How is this, but because whatever vices were from time to time apparent in the character of David, they did not belong to the basis, the substance of his character? The most fundamental and constant element in David's moral composition was an affectionate,

indeed a passionate, love of God, such as breathes in those Psalms which are undoubtedly his. And although he was at times untrue to this the deepest principle of his life, it was, notwithstanding, his deepest principle; and the vices which disfigured him from time to time were abandoned and repented of in deference to it. Yet here we have plainly a mixed character; good upon the whole, though with certain grave faults; just as the steward in the parable was bad upon the whole, yet with at least one considerable excellence.

And yet, my brethren, I am understating the case before us. In what did the steward's injustice consist? He suggested to his master's debtors that they should falsify their accounts, and with a view to providing for himself in bad times. The suggestion was prudent, but it was also dishonest; the prudent act was also the dishonest act. The case before us is not that of a man who is a thief one day and generous the next; dishonest in one relation of life and prudent in another. One and the same resolution and action of the steward is at once dishonest and prudent; it has these two aspects: it is dishonest on this side and prudent on that. Here, if our Divine Lord were less than what He is, we might at first sight be tempted to say that He runs a risk in eulogising this prudence, which is thus, in practice, actual dishonesty; —that as He lifts the virtue on high for our imitation, the vice which so closely adheres to it forbids us to yield an immediate and unreserved obedience, even to His judgment. And, in fact, the unhappy Emperor Julian, with the intelligent bitterness of which they only are capable who have known what faith is and then have apostatised, did broadly maintain that in this parable the Divine Teacher held up for our imitation not merely or chiefly the prudence, but the unrighteousness of the steward.

The truth is, my brethren, that in the moral world, as

there are mixed characters so there are mixed actions. An action more commonly than not has more than one complexion; its motives are mixed, and its form or substance is mixed. And as we may take a conglomerate mineral in our hands and fix our eyes upon some solitary ingredient that goes to make up the composite mass, so we may fix our minds upon one aspect of a complex action, not as denying that it has other aspects, but for the purpose of studying this one.

Take, for instance, a mixed action like that of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, in killing Sisera when he had taken refuge in her tent after the battle on the Kishon. It has two aspects, that deed of Jael's. Looked at in itself, and without reference to any authorisation from above, it is a treacherous violation of those duties of hospitality which man's natural conscience always recognises. But, regarded in the light of the history of Israel, it is an act of obedience to the known will of God that the enemies of His cause and kingdom should be cut off; and it is with this side of the deed alone in view that the inspired songster cries, "Blessed above women shall Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, be."[1] Something of the same kind must be said of King Jehu's relentless persecution of the family of Ahab. It was an act of obedience to a judicial sentence which had been pronounced from on high; and yet personal ambition and human passion largely coloured it; and we are obliged to fix our eyes on one aspect of it, and to forget the other, if we would understand the manner in which it is referred to in the Bible.

Again, in our Lord's parable of the unjust Judge, the Judge's attention to the widow's petition is good, the motive which compels it—"lest by her continual coming she weary me"[2]—is bad; but we are left to observe this

[1] Judg. v. 24.

[2] St. Luke xviii. 5.

for ourselves. Again, the man who in one of the parables of the kingdom of heaven sold all that he had that he might buy the field in which the treasure was hidden, was admirable in the anxiety which he showed to secure the treasure, but not by any means admirable in concealing the fact from the vendor that the field was so valuable because the treasure was there. So it is, in the parable before us, with the conduct of the steward. For the moment the dishonesty of the steward's action is put entirely out of sight: had it been in question, something very different from commendation must have been uttered by the landowner. Our attention is concentrated exclusively upon the practical foresight which the steward's action exhibited; and of this it is said that "the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely."

Now, here is a valuable lesson as to the true way of thinking about human characters. Consciously or unconsciously, we are perpetually students of character in those around us: human faces, human language, human actions are so interesting because they express character. Indeed, character still interests us, when all that is outward in life has ceased to do so: but then, unless we take care, the study of character may easily make cynics of us; there is plenty to be observed that feeds the wish to disbelieve in any goodness, or at least in any goodness better than our own. Now, what our Lord here implicitly teaches, is to let our minds rest as much as may be on what is best in human characters and in human actions. He does not bid us misread facts: He would not have us, in a spirit of insincere good-nature, feebly describe pure evil as some inferior form of good, or play tricks with our faculty of moral discernment. Evil is evil, and good is good; and if we look at what is good in human character, we are not thereby bound to mistake the true nature of evil features

closely bound up with it. But it is better for ourselves to dwell on the good and not on the evil: in the one case we are learners, in the other mere critics; in the one we are improving ourselves, in the other, very possibly, losing moral ground. If everything in a man's character is not admirable, still there is something that we may profitably admire; he has foresight, for instance, if he has not the higher and more precious excellence of honesty; and we do well to listen to the lord while he commends the unjust steward because he has done prudently.

II.

The other lesson of the parable is the high religious value of prudence; the need and function of prudence in relation to the life and future of the soul.

Among the virtues, prudence has something like a bad name: it is often spoken of as a worldly virtue. It seems to be at home, and to do its work best, in the things of this world of sense and time; it knows how to invest money advantageously, or to make a good match, or to conduct a delicate negotiation, or to smooth down a rising misunderstanding, or to build up the fortunes of a family, or to profit adroitly by other men's mistakes. Prudence deserts a party or abandons an opinion, we are told, when it shows symptoms of becoming unpopular; it makes friends in opposite camps, and is prepared for contingencies; it knows how to disown, how to attach itself, at the critical moment; how to take advantage of the tide in human affairs which leads on to fortune.

Prudence is not necessarily dishonest: God forbid! But it also is not characteristically disinterested; it is on the look-out for a passing advantage; it has, as we say, a constant eye to the main chance. Sometimes, as with the steward, it fairly passes the line which separates honest dealing from roguery; and yet, even in this degraded form,

it is so far a virtue that it takes some account of a coming future, and provides for it. "The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely."

And yet this earthly prudence is the degradation and caricature of a great and noble virtue. Prudence is in man what Providence is in Almighty God. His "never-failing Providence," as we know, "ordereth all things both in heaven and earth." Nothing takes Him by surprise; nothing places Him at a disadvantage: He has foreseen, or rather, He sees all, and is ready for the possible as well as the actual. Immeasurable, indeed, is the distance between the Infinite Mind and ours: but in such measure as man can anticipate the future accurately and make due provision for it, he reflects in his little sphere the all-embracing Providence of God. Only, why should this foresight be exerted only among the things of the world, when there is awaiting it so much vaster and nobler a field in which to exercise itself? Why should it be as true, as it indisputably is, that "the children of this world are in their generation more prudent than the children of light"?

There is one book in the Bible which might almost be named a handbook to prudence—I mean the book of Proverbs. Nowhere else can we find shrewder judgments of human nature, truer measures of things temporal and eternal, wiser rules for the conduct of life. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; but he that refraineth his lips is wise."[1] "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."[2] "The prince that wanteth understanding is a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days."[3] "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going."[4] "Through wisdom is an house builded: and by under-

[1] Prov. x. 19. [2] *Ib.* ix. 10. [3] *Ib.* xxviii. 16. [4] *Ib.* xiv. 15.

standing is it established."[1] "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding; for the merchandise thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than of fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things that thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her."[2]

Prudence, as we know it, is generally engaged in keeping a tight hand upon passion and impulse. It warns us not to insist on our full rights; not to insist on knowing everything; not to tell everybody all that we know; not to believe all that we hear; not to spend at once all that we have; not to make up our minds at once when we have a practical decision to take. But the great characteristic of prudence is that it keeps its eye on what is coming. Why does the great lawgiver say of Israel, that "they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them"? The answer is supplied by his pathetic exclamation: "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"[3]

Yes! the great business of prudence is to look forward to the future which really awaits us. What is that future? Nothing, most assuredly, that lies within the compass of the few years,—if indeed there are to be a few years,—that will precede our disappearance from this visible scene; but the existence beyond, of whatever character it be, to which, so far as we know, there is neither term nor limit. We know what to think of those who trifle with baubles, when great earthly interests are trembling in the balance, in those grave moments which come and pass, and come not again,—moments upon which all depends. Who can forget Carlyle's description of the unhappy Louis XVI., when, in his effort to escape from the triumphant Revolution, he was brought to a standstill by the suspicions or the officiousness of some of

[1] Prov. xxiv. 3. [2] *Ib.* iii. 13-15. [3] Deut. xxxii. 28, 29.

the petty local authorities at Varennes? A little nerve would have enabled him to escape the barrier that his enemies had thrown across the public road, by a slight circuit through the adjoining fields, and in twenty minutes he would have been safe among his friends; and the course of his own life and of European history might have been very different, to say the least, from the event. But he hesitated, and hesitation was ruin. He hesitated, and when they showed him into the parlour of the village inn he discussed, with the good-humoured courtesy that belonged to him, the precise quality of the Burgundy that was placed on the table;—but meanwhile events outside were shaping themselves beyond control into the fatal grooves of that long procession of humiliation and suffering which ended with the guillotine. This life for many of us is the halt at Varennes. It is incumbent on us, first of all, to feel how immense are the issues that depend on the use we make of its fleeting moments: we must bear in mind that its opportunities are as brief as the consequences that depend on our use of them are incalculable. This power of anticipating the reality is the first ingredient of religious prudence. We too have the sentence of dismissal hanging over us: but do we understand what it means, as did the unjust steward in the parable?

And the second business of prudence is to take measures to prepare for that which is coming on us, and to lose no time in doing so. Here again the example of the steward is admirable. The particular measures which he took are of course bad enough, but that he did take measures is the ground of his commendation by the landowner. Here, brethren, we all of us are, knowing perfectly well that we must die, and at no distant time: we know that beyond death there is a world, our condition in which will depend on what we are, or by God's grace are

made to be, in this: we know that every minute as it passes brings us nearer to that world: and yet, although we prepare for all kinds of nearer futures, petty and transient,—for our professional tasks, for our married life, for our holidays, for the increase and education of our families, for our old age,—we scarcely give anything better than vague hopes that all will somehow turn out for the best, to that tremendous and most certain future which lies beyond the grave. Surely "the children of this world *are* wiser in their generation than the children of light," and the steward has a lesson to teach us which we cannot learn too soon.

These serious thoughts are deepened by the solemn event which has happened within the last twenty-four hours. Bishop Claughton, the archdeacon of London, died last night.[1] His position in this cathedral and in the diocese would alone make his death an event of public importance; but as Chaplain to the Forces he held a place of much greater moment to the spiritual future of the country than the superintendence of many a diocese. His burden of work was probably greater than his health could bear, and he has shortened his life by his devotion to duty. Those who were in any way associated with him, whether agreeing with his opinions or not, will long remember him as a kindly and genial colleague or superior; but we all of us may learn one lesson from him which is suggested by to-day. Bishop Claughton was certainly a man who lived much in the thought of the other world; and we may humbly trust that he has entered it to find that rest and peace which were the objects of his hopes and prayers.

We also, brethren, cannot let things drift, and trust for a good issue to some imaginary chapter of accidents. We must make friends, as did the steward, who will receive

[1] August 9th, 1884.

us, in this new future, into their houses. And who are these friends? Certainly the parable suggests the poor; the object of the parable was to teach the converted publicans that the mammon of unrighteousness—the wealth which had been raised, often unjustly, in farming the Roman taxes,—might make friends who would receive the owner into everlasting habitations. But how could the poor do this? The answer is suggested in our Lord's account of the last Judgment: "I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: naked, and ye clothed Me: sick and in prison, and ye visited Me."[1] The story of Alvarez of Cordova, who wrapped up in his robe the leper who was lying, deserted of all men, by the roadside, and who set him down on his bed, to find that he had already passed away, but also to discover on his brow and hands and feet the marks of the Passion, embodies the reason why the poor can be said to receive into everlasting habitations. They are not alone, they are identified with One Who has shared their sufferings without sharing their weakness, and Who knows how to reward what is done to Himself in them.

Yes, assuredly, one Friend there is Whose power to help us is without limit. He can help us through our passage to our new home, for He died that "by death He might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage."[2] And He can provide for us when we get there, since among His parting words were these: "In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you."[3] Are our relations with Him such as to warrant our claiming His help in the hour of need? Are the fruits of serious faith in Him, repentance for past sin, regular habits of prayer, discipline

[1] St. Matt. xxv. 35, 36. [2] Heb. ii. 14, 15. [3] St. John xiv. 2.

of the heart and temper, communions carefully prepared for, and, not least, the devotion of our means, so far as we can afford, to the service of His Church and His poor,—are these things traceable in our lives? If they are not, we have yet to learn from the unjust steward the most elementary exercise of the virtue of prudence. If they are, we may hope, through no original merit of our own, but through His mercy and grace Who has redeemed us, so to pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal.

SERMON XIV.

UNTHANKFULNESS.

St. Luke xvii. 17.

And Jesus, answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

IN order to do justice to the act of mercy recorded of our Lord in to-day's[1] Gospel, and to the subsequent conduct of the lepers, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the physical, the religious, and the social misery which leprosy involved.

I.

1. The leprosy of the Bible belonged to the class of skin diseases which are especially provoked by the dry, hot atmosphere of Egypt and the East, acting upon a large and exposed surface of the human body. These diseases are aggravated when, as of old in Egypt, large numbers of men work in kilns, or among dry and powdery substances, or are neglectful of personal cleanliness. The leprosy of the Bible is not, it would seem, exactly the disease which goes by that name in modern Europe, and which is still not uncommon in Spain and Norway. The two diseases may have been always distinct; but, on the other hand, it is well known that in the course of years a disease may exhaust its type, disappear, and then reappear in a modified form. The leprosy of the Bible is now described as the Mosaic or white leprosy; its symptoms are

[1] The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.

enumerated in Lev. xiii.; it was the leprosy of Miriam, of Naaman, of Gehazi, of King Uzziah. It was little better than a living death. Beginning on the surface of the body, it poisoned all the springs of life; one by one the limbs of the sufferer decayed and fell away. The leper, in Scripture language, was "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb."[1] This loathsome appearance, which must have inspired the patient and all around him with a sense of extreme humiliation and disgust, was aggravated, it is needless to say, by very considerable suffering. And, to crown all, no cure was possible except by Divine interposition: no skill of man in that age could cope with this foul disease. "Am I a god?" exclaimed the king of Israel, on receiving the Syrian ambassadors on behalf of Naaman, "Am I a god, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?"[2]

2. But leprosy was not merely physical misery: it had, in Jewish eyes, and on Divine authority, a religious significance. It was viewed, not so much as a punishment of sin, but as a symbol and expression of its presence and triumph. Beyond or alone among other diseases, leprosy was the chosen symbol of moral defilement. It was a visible manifestation of sin. The spiritual eye of a wilful or degenerate race was too dull to discern the stain and wound which moral evil leaves upon a spiritual being; but a loathsome disease inflicted this lesson in moral truth upon man's sluggish or reluctant senses. From physical evil which he did see, man was to learn something about moral evil which he did not see. Thus leprosy was the outward sign of an inward curse; it was, so to put it, a sacrament of moral death. Accordingly the leper was bidden by the ancient law to bear about with him the emblems of the dead: his

[1] Numb. xii. 12. [2] 2 Kings v. 7.

garments were rent, as if in mourning for his dead self; his head was bare, as was the wont of those who held converse with the dead;[1] his lip was covered; he could only be legally cleansed with cedar-wood, and hyssop and scarlet, as those who had been defiled by contact with a corpse.

3. To this physical and religious misery was added another and a social one: the leper was banished from the companionship which might have soothed, if it could not cure, his pain; he was put out of the camp or city or village which had been his home. Even when the disease was not yet proved, and when the suspected mark might turn out to be purely innocent, a seclusion of seven days, and under certain circumstances, of seven days more, from the communion of the confederate people was prescribed by the ancient law. And when leprosy had been proved, influence and station, however exalted, could do nothing to avert or mitigate the prescribed sentence. Miriam, the sister of the great lawgiver himself, was thrust without the camp. Uzziah, king though he was, must dwell in a separate house till the day of his death. This was in part, no doubt, a sanitary precaution;—whether based upon popular apprehensions, or on an accurate estimate of the contagious nature of the disease, I do not now inquire; but it was much more due to the religious estimate of leprosy which was current in ancient Israel. The leper was a living emblem of that sin which no mere human healer can cure or expel; of that sin which excludes from the camp or city of God,—that everlasting city into which, as we know, "there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth."[2]

[1] Numb. vi. 6; Ezek. xxiv. 17.

[2] Rev. xxi. 27.

words, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." But ere He did this, our Lord also uttered the noteworthy exclamation, "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."

My brethren, He Who "knew what was in man," and Who had already tasted so much of human ingratitude, could not have been surprised, even by the conduct of the nine lepers. But He calls attention to it as having, like His own merciful act, a typical value. The averages of gratitude and ingratitude do not vary much from age to age: and what here took place on a small scale would reappear, again and again, in the history of Christendom and of the world. Of Christians, it is probably true at this moment that about ten per cent. are grateful to God for His mercies in nature and grace, and that ninety per cent. are more or less conspicuously wanting in gratitude. And if this, or anything like it, be the true state of the case, it is a fact which certainly deserves attentive consideration.

Want of gratitude towards Jesus Christ on the part of a Christian seems at first sight inexplicable. For gratitude is a natural virtue; man is capable of it in its highest forms without the grace of Christ. Plato thanked the gods that he was a man, a Greek, an Athenian, and born in the age of Socrates. Seneca writes to his benefactor, "I cannot adequately thank you, but I shall not cease to say that I cannot." Not merely civilised but barbarous life is capable of the courtesies and self-sacrifice of true gratitude. Nay, there have been remarkable traces of it among the lower animals. Every one has heard of the lion who refused to touch a Christian who was exposed to the beasts in the amphitheatre, because he recognised in him the friend who had once tended his wound in the desert. And for us Christians how overwhelming are the motives to gratitude! The number, the magnificence, the practical

value of the blessings which we receive from God through Jesus Christ our Lord, conspire with our sense of His love and generosity to make gratitude, one would think, inevitable. And yet, as if anticipating the real state of the case, the Scripture insists with great fervour and copiousness upon what might have been taken for granted. "When ye have eaten and are full," says Moses, "ye shall bless the Lord your God."[1] "What shall I render unto the Lord," says David, "for all the benefits which He hath done unto me? I will receive the cup of salvation, and will call upon the name of the Lord."[2] "In everything give thanks," says St. Paul, "for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."[3] "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him."[4] "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."[5] To the Colossians he writes, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts: and be ye thankful";[6] and to Timothy, "I exhort therefore that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men."[7]

These are but a few of the passages which might be quoted; their number shows how much, in the mind and judgment of the Holy Spirit, such precepts would be needed in the days to come. Whether they are needed or not, my brethren, is a question for your consciences and mine—a question into which it does not seem necessary to enter at any great length.

III.

1. Of the unthankfulness which so seriously depresses and blights our modern Christian life, one reason, in

[1] Deut. viii. 10. [2] Ps. cxvi. 11, 12. [3] 1 Thess. v. 18. [4] Col. iii. 17. [5] Phil. iv. 6. [6] Col. iii. 15. [7] 1 Tim. ii. 1.

many cases, is, that we do not see our Benefactor. I do not forget that some of us may feel true gratitude to those human friends who have been kind to us in past years, and have passed away and are out of sight. But take men in the mass and it is otherwise. Little by little, as the years pass, too many of us forget the benefits which we owe to the dead. The pressure and importunity of the present and the seen make us overlook the debt of thought and love which we owe to the past and to the unseen. There is a cynical proverb,—one of those proverbs in which our poor human nature passes stern judgment upon itself,—"Out of sight, out of mind."

In the miracle before us, you will remember, the lepers were still uncleansed when they left our Lord, that in obedience to His word they might show themselves to the priests. When the miracle was wrought upon them the Worker was out of sight. He had walked on towards the village, and they, avoiding the village, were pursuing their way towards Jerusalem. Yes! at that moment of awe and blessing they did not see Him. No shadowy form hovered about them to remind them that He was present in power to heal them. No word like the "I will, be thou clean," which had healed the leper at Capernaum two years before, now fell upon their ears; no hand was raised in benediction; and yet, minute by minute, the foul disease was disappearing, when or how they could not exactly tell: and at last they saw that they were healed. But the Healer Himself they did not see; as now in His Church, so then, He was out of sight, even when His action was most felt and energetic. His words still lingered on their ears, but it was not impossible, amid the distractions of a new scene, to forget their import: and thus, out of the ten men, nine did forget it.

Now, what is this but a sample of that which passes in daily life? Numbers who are here know what it is to

have recovered from serious or painful illness. God, by His providence, has directed us to use means which might assist, but could not ensure recovery. We have recovered; and we proceed to account for our recovery. It was "a good constitution" that carried us through, or it was "a skilful change of treatment at the crisis of the illness," or it was "a change of weather," or "a change of air." Now, if this was not intended to be a complete account of the matter,—if it was remembered that weather, climate, medical skill, strength of constitution, are all instruments in the hands of a Supreme Agent, and that, ever mindful of His agency, we are merely describing the particular instrument which He had selected to carry out His purpose, no harm would have been done. But do we not too often stop short at the secondary or immediate cause of our recovery, and altogether forget the First? We see the secondary cause; the First or real cause we do not see, and we are so largely the slaves of sense that the horizon of our view is the exact measure of our gratitude. Alas, brethren, how do we thus turn God's loving generosity against Himself! Unlike those vulgar benefactors who insist upon being recognised while they dispense their bounty, God, generally speaking, hides His hand. He acts through laws which seem to operate spontaneously; He acts through agents who are at the moment perfectly free and self-determining; He conceals Himself behind the vast processes of nature, behind the slow movement of history, behind the clouds of heaven;—till at last we conceive of the world, of the universe, as going on without Him,—without Him, its sole Author and its absolute Lord. His generous self-concealment is taken for a forced inactivity; and of those who still believe Him to have been the Author of all that is not Himself, too many think of Him as men now-a-days think of those old builders of schools and colleges who have left their great foundations

to later ages, and are powerless to assert any control over their handiwork,—which is manipulated and re-arranged by some Parliamentary Commission. Thus God's very generosity only provokes our thanklessness. He keeps out of sight, and we take it for granted that He would show Himself if He could, and that His agency is only invisible because it is shadowy or unreal. Oh singular perversity of our fallen nature, which is thus bound and enslaved in captivity to sense, that "we forget God our Saviour," chiefly because He is too loving to overwhelm us with the sense of our obligations to Him!

2. A second cause of unthankfulness is an imperfect appreciation of God's gifts. No doubt while the nine lepers were covered by a foul disease, placed under a social and religious ban, excluded from the society of their countrymen, they would have thought that no blessing in life could compare with that of being cured of leprosy. But what did they think after the cure had been wrought? Too probably this:—that health was no such peculiar blessing after all, since it was shared by multitudes; in being free from leprosy they were only like the great majority of their countrymen; why should they become enthusiastic over a condition of things which was not the exception but the rule?

Is not this the temper of Christians now-a-days? We are not incapable of gratitude; we can rouse ourselves to acknowledge signal and extraordinary blessings. The one survivor from a wreck, or in a railway catastrophe, can still say "Thank God!" with unaffected sincerity. But why should he thank God for benefits which he shares with all the world—for existence, preservation, light, food, strength, the use of reason, friends, home, and the like? He does not say that he ought not to be thankful for these things, but he secretly thinks that his gratitude will be somehow vulgarised if it is lavished upon these every-

day gifts. Had God given less, or given what He gives less indiscriminately, He would, it appears, have been thanked more warmly and frequently than now.

And this feeling is applied even to the blessings of redemption and grace. We have heard all our lives of "God's inestimable love in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ"; we think so little of it, it may be, because this blessing is in its scope so vast and inclusive. If the Eternal Son of God had redeemed us individually, and none others; if, instead of willing all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, He had made a very select few, ourselves among the rest, objects of His discriminating love, it had been otherwise. But when His love is as diffused as the sun's rays, when He opens His arms upon the Cross to all the families of mankind, and bids any who wish drink of the water of life freely; why, men ask, should we individually dissolve into ecstasies of gratitude in acknowledgment of things which are the portion of countless multitudes?

This estimate of a blessing which takes little account of it unless it be a rarity, like hothouse fruit or flowers in mid-winter or early spring, is not really due to a high ideal of excellence which sees the great only in the unwonted. Its true source is that dulness and sluggishness of spiritual perception which health and prosperity too often inflict upon the soul; we cannot see clearly through the thick film which has thus formed over the spiritual eye. If we did, how impossible would it be to forget that God could not, without being untrue to His own glorious perfections, mete out His love and sympathy in the narrow measure which, it seems, would earn our gratitude! If we did see, we should own with full and thankful hearts that love is love, blessings are blessings, salvation is salvation, whether we share them with the many or

with the few. The deliverance of the lepers was not less signal because the health to which they were restored was the portion of the great majority of their countrymen; nor was their gratitude less due because, in another form, it was due from thousands of others.

3. A third reason, in many minds, against cultivating and expressing thankfulness to God, is the utilitarian one:—men do not see the good of it. The value of prayer is, in Christian eyes, plain enough. Christians believe that certain blessings, at any rate, are to be obtained from God by the instrumentality of prayer; and not to pray is to forfeit that which prayer obtains. "But thankfulness," men say to themselves, "what does it win for us that is not already secure without it? Man already enjoys that for which he gives thanks. The lepers *were* healed; what was to be won by turning back to thank the Healer? God surely does not want our thanks, as if they were a sort of equivalent for His bounty; He blesses us out of the joy of doing so, and whether we thank Him or not must be of little concern to so great a Being."

Certainly, brethren, God does not expect to be repaid for His benevolence by any equivalent in the way of thanksgiving that we can possibly offer Him. And yet He will have us thank Him, not for His own sake, but for ours. He loses nothing, though we forget Him altogether. But we cannot be wanting in this great duty of thankfulness without being untrue to the law of our existence,—without the worst results upon ourselves. For what is thankfulness such as God demands, but that which is at the bottom of all human excellence—the frank acknowledgment of truth? As prayer is a recognition of our dependence upon God amid the darkness and uncertainties of the future, so thankfulness is a recognition of our indebtedness to Him for the blessings of the past. To acknowledge truth is always moral strength; to refuse to acknowledge

it is always moral weakness. Accordingly the worst excesses of heathenism are traced by St. Paul to the ingratitude of the Gentile nations for the light of nature and conscience. "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."[1] In the same strain, all the later apostasy and misery of Israel is referred, in the prophetic song of Moses, to the original vice of forgetting what God had done for His people. God had found Israel, says the lawgiver, "in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him. . . . He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock."[2] And then, after all, looking across the centuries, Moses thus addresses the degenerate race: "Of the Rock That begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God That formed thee."[3] And then he utters, in the name of God, the prophetic sentence: "I said, I will hide My face from them: . . . I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend Mine arrows upon them."[4] And then he adds, in yearning love: "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end."[5]

And this law is not less true of Christians and of Christendom. Nations, churches, men, who forget their true Benefactor, are in a sure way to ruin, temporal and eternal. God cannot be forgotten with impunity. And thankfulness, like the rivers which flow into the ocean and are again

[1] Rom. i. 21. [2] Deut. xxxii. 10-13.
[3] Deut. xxxii. 18. [4] *Ib.* 20, 23. [5] *Ib.* 29.

replenished from it, is the source of new blessings to the soul. Nay, only in thankful hearts is the Christian life securely maintained, and to that life gratitude contributes three most important results.

1. It stimulates powerfully to active well-doing. A man will do out of gratitude much more than he will do out of fear, or from hope of reward. Thankfulness for redemption was the motive power of a life like that of St. Paul,—as it has been the motive power of all the greatest and most fruitful lives that have been lived in Christendom. "Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves":[1]—this is the motto of such lives. Gratitude, like love, lives not in words, but in deed and in truth. Often those who feel most what has been done for them say least about it; but they do most. Gratitude can work; gratitude can suffer; gratitude can persevere. But one thing gratitude—for the inestimable love of God in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ—cannot do: it cannot bring itself to feel that it has done enough; it cannot, in this world, lie down with a sense that it has really paid off its debt to the Redeemer.

2. Again, gratitude makes worship, especially public worship, real and sincere. Praise is the soul of the Church's worship; and praise is the voice of thankfulness. The first object, we are told twice every day, which makes us Christians assemble and meet together in church, is that we may "render thanks for the great benefits which we have received at God's hands." These thanks are expressed in the majority of the Psalms, in the Hymns and Canticles, in the *Te Deum* beyond other hymns (who but the thankful can even remotely understand it!), above all, in the Holy Sacrament, on that very account named by the early Christians the Eucharist, wherein (to use the words

[1] 2 Cor. v. 15.

of our Prayer-Book), we "entirely desire God's fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." It has been said that our public worship would be much less unworthy of Him to Whom it is addressed, if, before beginning, Christians would think exactly what they most need to obtain by prayer at the hands of God. It may be said with at least equal truth, that this most desirable improvement would be secured, if we all of us had more of the spirit of the one leper in the Gospel, and less of the spirit of the nine. Each act of worship would then be a conscious turning back on the road of life, to fall at the Redeemer's feet, and give Him thanks for the incalculable blessings which all who know anything of themselves, anything of Him, know that He, and He alone, has won for them.

3. Lastly, thankfulness here on earth is the best possible preparation for the spirit and the life of heaven. Heaven is the home of thankful souls; its occupations would be misery to those who feel no gratitude. "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever."[1] "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."[2] How shall we sing that song, or any song of the redeemed hereafter, if we do not learn their spirit here and now? If the habits which are forming in this life will be carried by each of us into the eternal world, how should we not pray God to give us that "due sense of all His mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful," and that "we show forth His praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to His service"?

[1] Rev. vii. 12. [2] *Ib.* v. 12.

SERMON XV.

THE PHARISEE.

St. Luke xviii. 11.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are.

THE picture which our Lord sets before us in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican shows, among other things, how the temple was used by the people in His day. The people did not only attend its public services; they used it as a place of retirement for private prayer when no public rites of any kind were going forward. The temple welcomed them when they would escape from narrow and squalid homes, in which it was difficult to command either solitude or quiet. In the courts of the house of the Lord they might be practically alone, even though amidst a company of fellow-worshippers, and might pour out before God the secret sorrows and aspirations of their hearts. Much it is to be wished that the fabrics devoted to the worship of Christ in this Christian country could be more used for a like purpose than they are; and, in particular, that this great temple, whose doors, during so many hours of every day, are open to all the world, could be more generally turned to good account by Christians, as a welcome refuge from the distracting cares of life,—as a sanctuary in which weary or anxious souls might often offer their private tribute of prayer and praise to their Creator and Redeemer.

To the temple, then, went the Pharisee and the publican. Our Lord is describing what His hearers knew to be an everyday occurrence. In the temple there was room for all; the highest and the lowest there stood side by side before the majesty of God. And in the Pharisee and the publican were represented the very poles of religious and social respectability. We are now most concerned with the Pharisee.

I.

The Pharisees, as their name implies, were, before all things, men who insisted on their separateness from others. They came into existence as a distinct religious sect under the high-priesthood of Jonathan, about a century and a half before the Birth of Christ. Their ruling idea, their rallying-cry, was the duty of avoiding all intercourse with or assimilation to the ways of the Gentile world. This idea, let us observe, was deeply rooted in the religion of ancient Israel. The prophecy of Balaam was enshrined in the book of sacred law: "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations."[1] One of the most fatal errors of the Israelites after the conquest of Canaan was that "they were mingled among the heathen and learned their works, insomuch as they worshipped their idols, which turned to their decay: yea, they offered their sons and their daughters unto devils."[2] Mindful of this experience, the constant effort of religious men in later days was to insist that Israel, as the people of Revelation, was a peculiar or separated people, which, religiously speaking, could only be safe so long as it held aloof from the powerful and fascinating societies of heathen men around it.

[1] Numb. xxiii. 9. [2] Ps. cvi. 35, 36.

Insistence on this principle entered largely into the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah: and it acquired an altogether new vigour during the struggle against the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus was bent upon breaking down all the barriers which separated the Jews from his other subjects: he tried to proscribe Jewish observances, and to make the Jews, whether they would or not, live like Pagan Greeks. In the Second Book of the Maccabees the reign of Antiochus is accordingly called "the times of the mingling,"[1] or intermixture; and all the religious men in the country were banded together to resist this attempt of the heathen king even to death. The most energetic of these men were called Chasidim,—the pious; but their fervour soon became narrow, selfish, and bitter; it added to the troubles of the great leader Judas Maccabæus; and the name, thus discredited, soon passed out of hearing. Not quite two generations afterwards they reappear as the Separated ones, or the Pharisees; and as such they soon embraced within their ranks all the earnestly religious people in the land. They did this so largely that they could scarcely at one time be called a sect. Before the Birth of our Lord they had achieved a position of great influence, not unlike that of the so-termed Evangelicals in England some fifty or sixty years ago. And they owed their influence to the fact that they were largely men of earnestness and sincerity, who were upholding a principle which was undoubtedly of great importance to the old religion of Israel.

It is important to notice the motive of the observances and manner of life which we associate with the Pharisees. They eagerly multiplied all outward signs which could distinguish them from the heathen, or from those of their countrymen who seemed to have a fancy for heathen ways. Taken by themselves, and apart from the motive which

[1] 2 Macc. xiv. 3.

originally dictated them, many religious observances among Christians would be difficult to explain satisfactorily; and it is due to the Pharisees to remember why they began, a century and a half before the Birth of our Lord, to act as they did in religious matters. Their religious life was a protest throughout; a protest against a prevalent tendency to obliterate the lines which marked off the religion of Israel from heathenism. This was the meaning of the tassels on their dress: this was the object of the scrolls and small leathern boxes fastened on their foreheads and heads and necks, inscribed with texts of the law. It was to accentuate this difference that they braved popular scorn or anger by offering long prayers as they stood in public places; their strict fasts reminded them of duties, truths, events, with which the heathen had nothing to do; their constant washings recalled to them the ideal of moral purity at which a good Jew should aim, and of which heathenism knew nothing. Their distinctive observances were, indeed, most of them very modern: they were unknown before the Babylonish captivity, and the fiction which was current in Judæa in our Lord's day that they had been handed down traditionally from Moses to the great synagogue and thence to themselves, could only have grown up in an uncritical age, when religious men were too intent on a practical object immediately before them to enter on a severe examination of questions of theological or historical truth.

But we must not do the Pharisees injustice. In most respects they contrast very favourably with their latitudinarian rivals, the Sadducees, to whom the majority of the higher members of the priesthood belonged. They were more earnest, more anxious for the glory of God as they understood it, more anxious for the good of men as they understood it,—more religious, more humane. There can be no doubt that some of the

best men in the Jewish nation—Gamaliel for example—were Pharisees; and they could never have attained the great moral position which they undoubtedly held in our Lord's day unless they had, or had had, some substantial virtues which were generally recognised.

This better side of the Pharisees is thrown into sharp relief by the other representative man whom our Lord describes as going up into the temple to pray. No class was looked upon by Jewish opinion with such stern and universal condemnation as were the publicans. The publicans of the New Testament were, as you know, the collectors of the revenue that was paid by the population of Palestine to their Roman masters. Long before the conquest of Judæa the Roman senate had adopted the bad plan of farming both the direct taxes and the customs to individual capitalists or to companies, who undertook to pay a given sum into the public treasury, while making as large a margin of profit as they could for themselves. These capitalists, living in Rome, employed on their own account collectors in the different provinces of the empire; and each collector had a number of sub-collectors under him, who were generally taken from the population of each province. These sub-collectors are the publicans of the New Testament:—Zacchæus may have been a collector of the higher order; St. Matthew before his conversion was a sub-collector engaged in the custom-house at Capernaum. The sub-collector made what he could out of the revenue before he transmitted it to the collector; the collector took from it what he dared, before he forwarded it to the agency in Rome which undertook the farming of the taxes. The consequence, of course, was that these sub-collectors generally spent their lives on extracting as much money as they could from the people by whatever means they could. They seem to have had a large discretion in assessing the value of goods which had to pay duty, and to

have used their discretion unscrupulously. St. John the Baptist's advice to them, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you,"[1] is very suggestive as to their usual practice; and when Zacchæus professed to our Lord that "if he had taken anything from any man by false accusation, he restored him fourfold,"[2] he glanced at the common practice of his profession to bring false charges of attempts to cheat the revenue, in order to extort hush-money. Thus, in other provinces of the empire than Judæa, the lower order of publicans were spoken of as the wolves and bears of society, and there was a well-known current proverb, to the effect that every tax-collector was a thief. But in Judæa there was a feeling about the publicans of a peculiarly bitter kind, and to which nothing corresponded elsewhere. The Jewish scribes generally held that it was not religiously lawful to pay any tribute to a heathen government; and thus the publicans who exacted such tribute were, if Jews by birth, regarded as not merely oppressors of the people, but apostates from the religion of Israel. They were classed in the common talk of men with sinners and harlots; and to eat and drink with them was considered to be out of the question, not merely for a Rabbi, who expected to be looked up to, but for all decent people.

Our Lord, as we know, in His boundless compassion for the erring and the unfortunate, set Himself to correct and to defy common Jewish feeling about the publicans as about the Samaritans. He was in consequence scornfully described as "the friend of publicans and sinners." He did not scruple to meet publicans at entertainments. When he visited Jericho there were very many priests living there; and yet He chose to invite Himself to the house of the publican Zacchæus. Nay, He chose one member of this despised class to be an Apostle and

[1] St. Luke iii. 13. [2] *Ib.* xix. 8.

Evangelist. All this was part of His plan of showing that He came to save men of all sorts and conditions, and that none lay outside the scope of His redemptive love. But His merciful conduct, so far from contravening, is an illustration of the fact that, as a body, the publicans were men of bad character. They lived on the frontier of the criminal classes, if not actually belonging to them; and they were none the better for the varnish of official respectability which some of them wore before the world

II.

The Pharisee, then, as eminently representing the religious world of Judæa, seems to have everything in his favour, as he goes up into the temple to pray. And if the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,[1] the average publican, it must be owned, seems to have scant title to be heard at all. This, we may be sure, was the feeling of those who heard our Lord begin with the statement that "two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican." What then is the ground of our Lord's decision in favour of the publican? How comes it to be that, in His unerring judgment, "the publican went down to his house justified and accepted rather than the Pharisee"? Clearly there must be some most serious flaw in the case of the Pharisee, which can so entirely disturb what at first appears to be the balance in his favour: what is it in the man, what is it in his prayer, that our Lord condemns?

Was it his expression of thankfulness? Surely thanksgiving can never be out of place for those who believe in a Being Who is the Fountain of all goodness. Thanksgiving is a duty for all times and places. It is the occupation of the angels in heaven; it should be the

[1] Prov. xv. 8; xxviii. 9.

delight of good men on earth. It might be better for us Christians if we said more often than we do, after the Pharisee, "God, I thank thee." Christendom is often more like the nine lepers who never turned back to give glory to God than the one who did. Is it not the apostle of Divine grace who teaches us, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"?[1] Have we not just now been led to thank God for "all the blessings of this life, but above all for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory"? And if it be a great happiness to know the true religion, or to be free at least from great offences, is it not well to thank God for this? No, our Lord does not condemn the Pharisee for thanking God; He is more likely to condemn you and me for forgetting to do so.

Nor, surely, is the Pharisee the worse for not being an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer, or guilty of the practices which were common with the publican. It is not necessary to be indifferent to elementary morality in order to escape what is bad in Pharisaism; and a religion which should make men careless about elementary morality would not be a true or trustworthy religion. "Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle: or who shall rest upon Thy holy hill? Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life, and doeth the thing which is right, and speaketh the truth from his heart. He that hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour, and hath not slandered his neighbour."[2] The great preacher of the grace of God tells us as plainly as any writer in the Bible that there are sins which exclude from the kingdom of heaven.[3] Our Lord, we may

[1] 1 Thess. v. 18. [2] Ps. xv. 1-3.
[3] 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

be sure, does not condemn the Pharisee because he is alive to the difference between justice and injustice, between purity and impurity, between right and wrong.

Did our Lord then condemn the Pharisee for fasting twice in the week? Fasting was a duty for good Jews; it was enjoined even by prophets who warned men against trusting too much to ceremonial observances. If the Pharisee fasted more than the rule of his religion enforced, this, taken by itself, might have been a proof of his earnestness. Fasting is just as much a Christian duty as a Jewish; it is as much a Christian duty as prayer. It is not a popular duty; but our Lord Himself enjoins it on us in the Sermon on the Mount, and He adds directions which will save it from being ostentatious or vainglorious and, so, sinful. He could not then have condemned the Pharisee simply because he fasted twice in the week.

Was it then that the Pharisee was so wrong in giving tithes of all his produce? In doing this he was obeying the spirit as well as the letter of the law, which was commonly evaded by the many Jews who only gave to the service of God a tenth of certain specified products, omitting the rest. Here too, surely, we Christians should do better if we imitated the Pharisee; if we freely devoted at the least a tenth of our yearly income to God's service, instead of giving the little we give by fits and starts, upon no fixed religious principle whatever.

What then was the weak point, the fatal flaw in the Pharisee's case, which ruined so much that was in itself excellent, and availed to place him, in the judgment of our Lord, at a lower level than that of the poor publican?

It was this. This Pharisee's religion, as it appeared in his prayer, was a religion centering, not in Almighty God, but in himself. It was, therefore, properly speaking, not religion at all. In our days, no doubt, people use the

word religion in debased senses; they speak of a religion of art, a religion of humanity, a religion of politics; of even making a religion of anything which you have a taste for. But, properly speaking, religion means a certain relation of dependence and obligation between the soul and God: and when God is left out of the question, religion cannot really exist. In true religion the soul looks out of and beyond itself to that great Being Who is at once in His awfulness and His beauty the Stay and the End of its existence. But the Pharisee, even in prayer, is entirely taken up with himself. Look at him as he walks into the middle of the Court of Israel, as he places himself (so the original would seem to imply) in a chosen position or attitude. He names God; he thanks God: he cannot, of course, drop the conventional language of devotion. But he "stands and prays thus with himself," —that is, with the eye of his soul directed towards himself; he is thinking not of God, but of himself. He begins with an expression of thankfulness; but, as we examine it, what an equivocal sort of thankfulness his is!

Thankfulness, to be accepted, must go hand in hand with other things. It must be based on a sincere recognition of an unworthiness of the blessings for which we thank God; its heartfelt language must be, "Lord, I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies." True thankfulness is accompanied by great misgivings, on the score of the poor use that has been made of God's blessings in the past, and of the account which must one day be rendered for them. Especially does the truly thankful man ascribe the blessings of life to the Author of all goodness: from nothing does he shrink more unaffectedly than from seeming to claim any credit for himself. But the Pharisee's thankfulness is less an offering made by his soul to God than a conventional way of expressing his satisfaction with himself. He begins, "God, I thank

Thee." Had he been thinking of God he would have said, "I thank Thee for the grace and help that Thou hast given me, and to which alone I owe it that I have escaped the sins of other men." He does say, "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." Another Pharisee, who became a Christian Apostle, only mentions his place and work to add, "By the grace of God I am what I am. . . . I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."[1] The Pharisee of the parable says nothing of what he owes to grace, as he says nothing of what he needs on account of sin.

Consider again the man's comparison of himself with others: "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." No good is done by remembering the faults of other people, unless it be part of our duty to correct them, or when we are praying God to help them. To remember them only with the result of reflecting with satisfaction on our own superiority is folly and presumption indeed. General declamations about the wickedness of others are often unjust; others are not so bad as our suspicions or our rhetoric would make them. And pride soon grows apace when, under cover of deploring the sins of others, we are thinking with satisfaction of ourselves. After all, it is not much to have avoided vices to which perhaps we have never been strongly tempted. It is more useful to compare ourselves with true servants of God,—with those who, having fewer advantages than we to start with, have done much more for His glory and for the good of their fellow-men than we. If the Pharisee had remembered that God's judgment of men takes account of their opportunities, he would have felt that he might possibly be comparing himself with a superior. The publican had enjoyed none of his advantages, and had been exposed

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 10.

to temptations from which he had been free. It was something that the poor publican had come to pray in the house of God: surely this might have inspired interest and hope in a zealous Pharisee. And it was possible that this publican might be, in God's eyes, a Matthew, on the eve of conversion to a higher truth than the Pharisee knew of.

And then the Pharisee so carefully recounts his good deeds. Like a zealous Jew he fasted twice in the week, and paid tithe, not merely on some of the produce of his estate, but on all of it. These were good things to do; but why should he say anything about them, especially before God? The bloom of a good work is forfeited as soon as we take credit to ourselves for it; vanity of this kind is fatal to the real excellence which God approves and accepts. There may be occasions when a good man is forced to refer to what he has done; occasions when God's glory or his own usefulness are at stake, and for objects such as these, David, Job, St. Paul, do so. But the safe rule is to say nothing about our good deeds. No good work is really our own; it is God's work in us. And the best of works may easily be vitiated by sin, which is our own. Some bad motive or selfish purpose may make what seems so fair to the eye of man worse than worthless before God.

Especially observable is it that the Pharisee asks God for nothing—neither for pardon, nor mercy, nor grace. He seems to feel the need of nothing, neither of perseverance in his good deeds, nor of power to multiply them, nor of freedom from sins which would make them valueless. He is perfectly satisfied with himself; satisfied with what he is; satisfied with what he is not; satisfied with his superiority to other men; satisfied with what he does; satisfied with what he gives. Why should he pray? Prayer is the language of the needy, of the dependent, of the anxious;

it means misgiving on the score of all that side of life as to which he has no misgiving whatever. This is the crowning characteristic of his bearing in the presence of God; this is the vice which makes all that he does and is so utterly unacceptable to God,—his unalloyed satisfaction with himself.

Compare him with the publican. The publican does not venture beyond the Court of the Gentiles, though he may be a Jew by birth. He creeps inside the door and stands there "afar off";—far off indeed he is from the Pharisee. He has nothing to say to his own credit. If he is unlike other men, it is that he believes himself to be worse than other men. He is, or has been in his time, an extortioner, unjust, perhaps an adulterer. He has never fasted in his life. He has never given tithes or anything else to the service of God. He feels himself to be outside religion and everything connected with it; he has no right to be there treading the sacred pavement even of the outer Court of the Gentiles; he defiles it, he thinks, by his very presence; he has no claim, no title to consideration or acceptance which he can urge upon the Awful Being within the precincts of Whose sanctuary he has dared to venture. He is so far from being able to look around him for anything that may reassure him, that he cannot even raise his eyes to heaven. He can only smite upon his breast, and condense into a few words the greatest of the Psalms of penitence: "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Yet the publican's prayer has in it that indispensable quality which the Pharisee's lacks. The publican sees God, as Job saw Him, when he "abhorred" himself:[1] as Peter saw Him when he cried: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."[2] And seeing God, he offers his prayer, not to self, but to God.

[1] Job xlii. 6.

[2] St. Luke v. 8.

The superstructure of the Pharisee's religion,—his freedom from gross vice, his fasts, his tithes,—wants the foundation which the publican's has. The publican's religion has as yet no superstructure, that will come in time; but he is taking the first step,—the self-renouncing, self-emptying cry for help to the one Being Who can give it. The Pharisee, notwithstanding the outward purity of his life, and his self-sacrificing activity, is, in consequence of his tranquil satisfaction with himself, much further from God than is the publican. Both men equally need the Redemption which will presently be made on Mount Calvary; but the publican's heart is already open to embrace it, while the Pharisee's is closed.

III.

The Pharisees, as we know them in the Gospels, have long disappeared from the scene of history. But Pharisaism, as a spirit, survives. It wears Christian clothes and uses Christian language, but it is at heart still in the Court of the Temple, with its eye, not upon God revealed in His Blessed Son, but upon self; while it pityingly scans the real or imaginary publicans around who minister to the satisfaction which self requires. No Christians may safely deem themselves free from the pervading infection of the Pharisee spirit. We may sink into it if we think with satisfaction upon our attendance at Church services, or on our reception of the Holy Sacrament, or on kind acts done to the poor, or on work in Sunday-schools or for benevolent societies, or for Christian missions, or anything else that brings us credit with our fellow-Christians. We do not escape it if we pride ourselves on our rejection and distrust of all outward forms, on our indifference to the means of grace, on what we may deem to be the especial spirituality of our religion,

on our rejection of what is traditional in usage or belief. The essence of Pharisaism is not satisfaction in this or that particular feature of our religious state or practice, but in any part of it whatever. We may be just as thorough Pharisees in dwelling on the pure spirituality of our worship when contrasted with the fancied formalists or externalists around us, as in dwelling on our care for reverence and order in contrast with the irreverence of others, or on our practical benevolence in contrast with their apparent insensibility to the claims of the suffering and the poor. The subtle taint may insinuate itself everywhere; it may lurk beneath the robes of some great prelate as he pontificates in his cathedral, but also in the Quaker meeting from which all forms are consistently excluded; it may be the bane of a layman's religion no less than of a clergyman's; it may flourish north of the Tweed as well as south of it, and this side of St. George's Channel as well as on the other. It may infect Churches, too sure whether of their Catholic lineage or of their Scriptural purity to suspect the extent of their real shortcomings; and it may waylay and ruin individual souls who are even eagerly abjuring it, and in the very process of their doing so. None of us can deem himself safe against its approaches; and surely no precautions will be thought unnecessary which may help to keep it at bay.

Let me, then, offer one practical suggestion. When you find yourselves beginning to take a Pharisaic pleasure in contemplating this or that part of your religious life —your prayers, your emotions, your good works, your experiences, your influence over others, your familiarity with religious ideas and literature, your command of religious language or anything else of the kind,—try to remember any one passage in your past lives of which, even now, you can scarcely think without keen distress, even anguish, and which you would not have known to

those who respect and love you, for all that you possess. Some such passage there is in most lives; and you may turn the bitter memory to good account if you summon it up from oblivion to scare from your souls the hideous spectre of Pharisaism. One there is Who searches the very hearts and reins, Who knows it all; and while you remember that His Eye is upon you, in its awful Omniscience and its winning Tenderness, you will not have the heart to be a Pharisee.

Of this let us be sure, that our Lord's sentence on the prayer of the Pharisee in the parable holds good for all time. We shall not, we cannot, be accepted, if we come into the sacred Presence well satisfied with ourselves and thinking meanly of others. It is for ever true, as Mary sings with us each evening of the year in her *Magnificat*, that "God hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away." Without a deep dissatisfaction with self, neither true prayer, nor praise, nor thanksgiving are possible for us sinners, because these things are only possible when we are consciously uniting ourselves with Christ our Lord, and leaning on His prevailing merits and intercession. And our deep and constant need of Him can never be understood while the Pharisee temper has a hold on us. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."[1]

It is that we may dissociate ourselves from the Pharisee, and place ourselves in spirit side by side with the

[1] Rev. iii. 17, 18.

publican, that at the beginning of each morning and evening service the Church leads us to confess that we "have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep, that we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, that we have offended against His holy laws, that we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and that there is no health in us." Our ability to use this language sincerely is a very fair test of the vital question whether we have any such knowledge of self as comes from a true sight of the All-holy God; whether we are satisfied or out of heart with self; whether we have more in common with the Pharisee or the publican.

May our Lord of His mercy inflict on us any pain or humiliation we may need in order to attain that true self-distrust which welcomes His pardoning love; and then, when we are sure of our utter need of and indebtedness to Him, may He "create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us, and give us the comfort of His help again, and stablish us with His princely Spirit."[1]

[1] Ps. li. 10, 12.

SERMON XVI.

CHRIST'S TEARS OVER JERUSALEM.

LUKE xix. 41, 42.

And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

IT is impossible to read this account of the tears shed by our Lord over Jerusalem without being reminded of another mourner,—a mourner whom we meet, however, in the Old Testament. Ever since the middle of last month we have been reading in the daily lessons the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah; and last night we had reached the first chapter of his Lamentations.[1] There are few lives in the whole compass of religious history upon which the stamp of an even tragic melancholy is more deeply impressed than his. To predict the great Captivity at a distance of a century, as did Isaiah; or, like Daniel, to encourage the captive remnant by precept and example to bear their hardships and hope for a promised deliverance, might seem easier than Jeremiah's providential task. Jeremiah had to follow his country, step by step, downwards to its grave. His life was a bright morning rapidly overclouded, and ending in darkness and in storm. It began during the happy reign of Josiah. The great event of the reign of Josiah was the discovery of the old copy of the Pentateuch in the temple by the high priest Hilkiah

[1] This Sermon was preached on August 13, 1871.

and the reformation of religion which was based on that discovery. Everything for the time seemed brighter; the old fervour appeared to have been restored, the moral and spiritual forces of the country in some sense renewed. And yet five years before this great discovery Jeremiah had received his mission. He was sanctified from the womb to be a prophet, not to his countrymen only, but among the nations. He was "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."[1] He was, for a generation and a half, to rebuke the sins of his age with unheeded warnings; to discourage hopes which were clung to with an eagerness proportioned to their baselessness; to expose illusions which were passionately fondled, and to proclaim grave truths which were as passionately resisted and denounced. His priestly relatives could see in him only an apostate who disbelieved the promises made to the elect race of Israel; his prophetical rivals, who made it their business to reflect and express popular delusions, were exasperated by a ministry which was in all higher consciences a condemnation of their own. Thus his life was necessarily a life of suffering;—of mental, as well as, and even more than, of bodily suffering. For nineteen years, indeed, under the reign of the pious Josiah, his enemies were largely held in check, although even at this date his life was threatened by his fellow-townsmen at Anathoth, and he was obliged to make Jerusalem his home. With the great defeat of Megiddo and the death of Josiah the scene changed. Under the four last kings of Judah Jeremiah is constantly struggling—either against the levity and luxury of the court, as with Jehoahaz, or against the popular Egyptian policy so pregnant with religious ruin under his two successors, or against the false prophets and powerful counsellors who governed the conduct of the weak Zedekiah.

[1] Jer. i. 10.

During the last years of this prince Jeremiah was frequently imprisoned on the ground of the outspoken sincerity which was denounced as want of patriotism: and the final capture of Jerusalem only saved him from a cruel death at the hands of the princes. He survived, to be carried forcibly to Tahpanhes in Egypt, where he denounced the increasing sympathy with Egyptian idol-worship among his countrymen, and where, it would seem almost certain, he suffered martyrdom at their hands.

The Lamentations of Jeremiah have been supposed to be alluded to by the author of the second Book of the Chronicles, who speaks of a Lamentation composed by this prophet after the great defeat at Megiddo and the death of the good king Josiah. But this earlier Lamentation must have been lost: as the book which we possess under that name clearly describes the robbery and pillage, the confusion and suffering, the sacrilege and desolation, which followed on the actual capture of the holy city. The prophet, who had been accused of want of patriotism because he had warned his countrymen of their coming doom, pours out in these plaintive lines the tenderest and most affectionate of hearts in a wail of the bitterest agony. Although, in order, as it would seem, to restrain the excessive passionateness of feeling, he imposes on himself the rigorous acrostic rule which is often found in the later Hebrew poetry,—as in the 119th Psalm,—of making each verse, or each strophe, begin with a separate Hebrew letter, in the order of their alphabetical significance, yet his grief is like a stream which no artificial dyke can thus restrain; it flows forth as fully and freely as if he were fettered by no stern rules of composition. If you would study the grief of which the human soul, in its purest, highest moods, is capable, read the Lamentations of Jeremiah. Their very motto is itself prophetical: "Is

it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." [1]

In the four hymns which make up this book, together with a fifth which is a sort of appendix, the prophet abandons himself to the anguish with which the sight of the ruined city, of the humiliation of the chosen people, and of the mocking heathen around, fills his soul. All the most tragical incidents successively pass before him :— the horrors of the siege, the dreadful famine, the supreme terror of the moment of entry by the victorious troops, the unspeakable miseries of the exile which followed. And the deepest sorrow is that all this was a consequence of the moral evil which he had himself pointed out; it might have been avoided. Of his own personal sorrows he thinks not, except so far as they are identified with those of his people. He ends with a prayer in which he associates himself by penitence with the sinners whom he had warned in vain.

It has been said that as each of the ancient saints, so each of the ancient prophets, is represented in our Lord Jesus Christ;—that He is, to use a phrase of St. Irenæus,[2] the recapitulation of all His predecessors; and that in Him that which is characteristic of each of them finds its place. If this be so, Jeremiah lives again in the tears shed by Christ over Jerusalem; those tears are a condensed epitome of the Lamentations. There are indeed differences in the two cases : Jeremiah mourns over an accomplished destruction; our Lord, to Whom the future is as the present or the past, over a ruin which was yet undreamt of by its victims. In Jeremiah's lament there is a note of disappointment, which our Lord's perfect knowledge rendered impossible : He, the Omniscient, of course must mourn without surprise. Jeremiah, though sanctified from the womb, cannot but bewail his own personal share

[1] Lamentations i. 12.

[2] *Adv. Hæreses*, iii. xxi. 10.

in the sins of his country: in Jesus, neither on this nor any other occasion, do we trace the slightest consciousness of any taint of personal sin. But in the main the cases are parallel, and so Jeremiah is what we term an eminent type of Christ. This does not merely mean that there are certain resemblances, external, accidental, superficial, between these two lives, placed at widely separated periods of history. For typology is not a fanciful study of resemblances which may be traced almost anywhere, and which mean really nothing when you have discovered them: it proceeds upon and presupposes a law of God's government of the world. That law is, that God is consistent with Himself amid the infinite variety of His work; that as He does not change His mind, the principles upon which He governs in one age are surely at work in another, and that therefore circumstances and characters and events will so far repeat themselves that one series will be a foreshadowing of another. And when once it is understood that Christ our Lord was the highest Goodness in human form, and that by His appearance He provoked the antagonism of the fiercest wickedness, it will be readily perceived that lesser forms of goodness and lesser forms of evil had a preparatory relation to these, the consummate and perfect forms. Jeremiah was in his work and in his sorrow the shadow of a Greater than himself.

The Jerusalem of our Lord and the Jerusalem of Jeremiah differed in many respects; but they agreed in this,—that each was a prey to evils which threatened destruction,—that each had had special warnings and opportunities,—that as in the first case, so in the last, these warnings were unheeded until it was all too late. For indeed history had repeated itself. The Jerusalem which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed had since risen from its ruins under the Persian monarch, and had attained no little

moral and material greatness under the Maccabees. It was in many ways more loyal to ancient truths, more devout to its Heavenly Master, than the old city of Jeremiah had been: and yet its very heart was eaten out by insincerities, and was blinded by delusions which were fatal to its wellbeing. It had, by materialising Scripture language, converted the promises of Messiah into so many reasons for rebellion against the Romans at the first practicable opportunity. It had come to treat the Mosaic system, not as the portico of the temple of the heavenly kingdom, but as the temple itself. It had learnt to bury the genuine life of souls more and more entirely beneath conformity to an outward pattern of religious respectability; nobody in Jewish society thought of "exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" except a few Galilean peasants, who were condemned as madmen. And when Christ came and preached a spiritual kingdom which did not interfere with the temporal rule of Cæsar, because it belonged to another order of existence; and a higher law and a purer communion with God, to which the old worship and law were but preparatory; and, above all, a clear transparency of motive which was careless of man's judgment, but very careful of the judgment of God, He was treated as the priests under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah had treated Jeremiah. He saw how it would be, and before the event He wept as if all had been accomplished. "When He was come near He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

I.

In our Lord's lament over the doomed city there is to be traced a threefold vein of feeling, which in

modern language would be termed the patriotic, the ecclesiastical, and the spiritual.

The tears and words of Jesus Christ are the tears and words of a true patriot. For Jerusalem was the heart and head of the nation; it was more what Paris is to France than what London is to England; and although Christ's ministry had been largely spent in Galilee, we know from St. John's Gospel how at the great festivals He had laboured in the sacred city. It may be thought that there was no place for patriotism in the heart of Jesus Christ;—that coming as He did from heaven with a mission towards the whole race of men, and with a work to do for them, He could not thus cherish a localised and bounded enthusiasm;—that as all had interest in Him, this interest must reciprocally be for all, and world-embracing;—that as in Him, according to His Apostle, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but all are one,"[1] so He must have been incapable of that restricted and particular concentration of thought and feeling and action upon the concerns of a single race or district which we practically understand by patriotism.

My brethren, there is an element of truth in this. Jesus Christ, although a Jew by birth, belonged, by His freedom from local peculiarities, to the whole human family. He was, in a higher, more comprehensive, more representative sense than any before, human. All that was best and richest in humanity had its place in Him, and this is, at any rate, one import of the title by which He was wont to speak of Himself,—the Son of Man. But His relation to the whole race did not destroy His relation to His country, any more than it destroyed His relation to His family,—to His blessed Mother, His foster-father, and those first-cousins of His, who, after the Hebrew custom, are spoken of as His "brethren." Certainly He subordinated

[1] Gal. iii. 28.

family ties as well as national ties to the claims of the kingdom of God,—to "His Father's business,"[1] as He called it when only twelve years old. But because He kept these lower sympathies, claims, obligations in their proper place, He did not ignore or disavow them. To Him, as the Son of Mary, His family was dear; to Him, as the Son of David, the history of His country was dear. He would have parted with something of His true and deep humanity had it been otherwise. And therefore when He gazed on the city of His ancestors, for such it was, and saw in vision the Roman conqueror already approaching, casting up his earthworks on that very hill on which He was standing, and then, by and by, entering the sacred city with fire and sword, nor resting from his work till he had ploughed up the very foundations, so that not one stone was left upon another, His Jewish heart felt a pang of anguish which became tears and words: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

It is sometimes said, I know, that patriotism is an old-world virtue,—that it belongs to barbarous ages when men never or seldom travelled, and when the private and petty concerns of their own city or tribe or country shut out from their minds and hearts the broad human interests of the race. It is said that patriotism is to disappear, and a new virtue, "cosmopolitanism," is to take its place. This has an imposing sound: but let us be on our guard. What if this new and impossible virtue be but the pretext put forth by a culpable selfishness for neglecting plain public duties which lie close to our own doors? What if it be but a duplicate of the less disguised selfishness which relieves itself from the care of near relatives by pleading devotion to public business? Depend upon

[1] St. Luke ii. 49.

it, in the order of God's Providence, our interests, our enthusiasms, our loyalty, like our charity, should begin, although they should by no means end, at home. They should begin with the family, then gather round the country, then embrace the race.

No; patriotism is not a decaying virtue, because the country, like the family, is a creation of God's Providence. It is not by chance that such and such races are fused together, occupying the same territory, governed by the same dynasty, the same laws, the same historical traditions; and as it is a sure sign of moral mischief when family affections and the sense of family duties are impaired, so it bodes no good when men think little of their country, and are unwilling to make sacrifices for her. May God save us English from this, which certainly was not among the errors of our forefathers! They may have been prejudiced, because they knew little of any countries but their own. But if we have learnt to do justice to others, let us not forget what is due to our own land and race. We have no reason to despise other nations: we have in truth much to learn from them: but the first homage of our hearts is due to the great country which gave us birth.

But patriotism is honest while it is tender; its very tenderness makes it true. Our Lord loved Jerusalem too well not to denounce its false ideals. But Jerusalem would not know the things which belonged to its political peace, so the few years passed, and then came the end. And now, as of old, nations have their warnings ere they are given up to ruin. It is unnecessary to point the stern moral of the events of last year,[1] which are so fresh in all our memories. Let us look at home. Have we English no "things that belong to our peace" to take heed to? Does Christ never visit us by His Providence as He visited Jerusalem in bodily form? He whispered to our grandfathers that the

[1] The Franco-Prussian War in 1870.

slave-trade was a dishonour to our Christian civilisation, and at no little sacrifice they obeyed Him. He has since then whispered to the fathers of this generation that the opium trade with China was a discredit to a Christian country, and, alas! we forced the demoralising traffic on a heathen nation by the sword. And at this moment we have to consider whether the sacred law of marriage, as stated by His own mouth, and recorded in the very letter of the Gospel, is observed in our Divorce Courts;—whether His precepts as to charity are kept in view in the administration of our poor law in this very metropolis;—whether the ostentatious luxury paraded at one end of society, and the miserable economical and social fallacies which barely conceal violent and selfish projects at the other, do not threaten us with evils in a not very distant future, unless He, by His Divine charity, can make both social extremes one, and break down the middle wall of partition between us. Ah! men read the "Battle of Dorking," and they bid our rulers increase our forces by sea and land, and take measures to ensure England's safety and England's honour against all outward foes. They may do well: but there are foes within—moral foes—which are too often apt to be neglected till it is all too late. What if over us, as over Jerusalem of yore, Christ should one day shed tears and cry, "If thou hadst known, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

II.

But the lamentation of Jesus Christ over Jerusalem has a higher than any merely political or social meaning. The polity of Israel was not merely a State, it was a Church as well: it was the kingdom of the Lord among men. It is this which explains the passionate emotion towards

Jerusalem which abounds in the Psalter; the joy in her glory and her beauty and her world-wide fame; the enthusiasm which "walks about Zion, and goes round about her, and tells the towers thereof"; the anger, deep and strong, which cannot forget that in the day of Jerusalem it was Edom that joined in the cry of destruction; the woe which cannot be comforted when she lies before the heathen ruined and desolate. It was as a theocratic kingdom, as a Church, that Jerusalem and the whole Jewish polity was so dear to religious Jews; and this aspect of the sacred city underlies the words of Jesus on the road from Bethany. He knew indeed that the old revelation was to be eclipsed by His own; that, as already waxing old, it was "ready to vanish away." But a change of this kind may be effected in one of two ways, by a gradual development or by a violent catastrophe. The rejection of Christ by the Jews made the catastrophe inevitable; and for the general interests of the world it was, we know, better thus. But to one Whose heart was twined around the venerable sanctities of the old religion, the thought of this violence could not but cause a pang. The temple, invaded by the brutal and blaspheming heathen,—the most holy place opened to the curious and irreverent gaze of a Pagan soldiery,—and then the voice of ancient chants and sacrifices within its walls hushed for ever by the devouring flames—it was piteous even to contemplate the scene: and Jesus wept at the contemplation!

There are many men who love their country sincerely, but who know not what it is to love the Church of God. Her triumphs and her sorrows, her humiliations and her progress, are nothing to them. They can see in her only the outward and the material,—a paid order of ministers, an appointed round of observances, temples set on high throughout the land. That body of fixed, certain, solemn truth which connects and explains all this they do not

see; and therefore they do not understand what it is that Churches lose when a great quickening of spiritual life or of extended usefulness is missed,—when a call to reformation or a call to some higher and clearer path of truth or duty is unheeded. And such calls do come to Churches now as they came to the Jewish priesthood and people in the days of Christ. The Church of Rome had warnings many and clear during the century and a half which elapsed before the Reformation rent half Europe from her communion. The Church of England had warnings during the years which preceded that piteous era, when the worldliness of the episcopate of the Georges, unable to appreciate a Divine enthusiasm of which it was, with few exceptions, itself incapable, banished Wesleyanism beyond the fold, and made a schism of what might have been a great increase of religious strength. And are there no opportunities, no anxieties, no warnings now? Are there none for the Church of Rome in Germany? Are there none for our own Church here? My brethren, I will not answer that question. God grant that over some future of disruption and ruin here, as there, the words may not be heard: "If thou hadst known, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."

III.

But Jerusalem was not merely a country or a Church in the eyes of Christ: it was a hive of living men and women,—a home of souls. Among these, to each of these, Christ had preached; and He had preached in vain. It was not the threatened architecture of the Herodian temple which drew tears from those Divine eyes; it was not the tragic ending of a history rich in incident and in interest: it was the condition, the destiny, of the individual men

and women of that very generation to which Christ had ministered. What of them? They had heard Him; and what were they after hearing Him? They had seen the sight which prophets and kings had desired to see; they had heard words which the saints of ancient Israel, in its successive generations, had longed to hear; they had enjoyed an opportunity for acquiring knowledge of, and deepening communion with, the Source of all life, such as had never been offered to any men of any race before. Were they the better for it? Were they even half disposed to make the most of it? Or had they—with the fewest exceptions—spurned it altogether? Ah! it was over those souls for which He was presently to shed His Blood that Jesus wept; it was for Him souls that made up Jerusalem.

It is in this sense that our Lord's words and tears come most closely home to us. Our influence upon our country, upon our portion of the Church, is necessarily very small; we are each but a private soldier in a great army, and we may have only a very remote connection indeed with the decisions upon which everything turns. But in our individual capacities it is otherwise. Here, as single souls, we decide as well as act: here we are free to make the most of opportunities, and are responsible for doing so. And opportunities come to us as we walk along the path of life, even as Christ came to the Jews of eighteen centuries ago. They come to us, we see them coming; we know that they are at hand, or even close upon us; we know, or might know, that they will not be within our reach always. It is "the time of our visitation." It is a friend who has brought before us, for the first time, the true meaning, the solemnity, the blessedness of life. It is a change of circumstances, or a great soul-crushing sorrow, which has forced upon us, against our wills, a sense of the transitory nature of all things

here below. It is some one truth, or series of truths, unknown before, or known and rejected, which has been borne in upon us with a strength and clearness of conviction which we cannot mistake, and which involves obedience, action, sacrifice as its necessary result. It is an atmosphere of new aspirations, of higher thoughts, of longings to be other and better than we are, which has taken possession of us. It is the presence and breathing, could we only know it, of a Heavenly Friend, Who haunts our spirits that He may sanctify them. Christ, in one word, has been abroad by His Spirit in the streets and secret passages of the soul, as of old He was abroad in the byways and temple-courts of Jerusalem. And the question is, Have we welcomed Him? Have we held Him by the feet, and refused to let Him go except He bless us? Or have we tried to shake Him off as if He were some dark prejudice or stupid superstition, and bidden Him retire to the neighbouring Mount, where He may mourn over a soul which will not know its day of grace?

We may think perhaps that, after rejecting an opportunity, we are at least no worse off than we were before it was offered. Brethren, it is not so. We are worse off, though we may not trace the deterioration. We have suffered, if not without, yet assuredly within. We have been tried and have failed; and failure means weakness entailed upon, incorporated with, the system of the soul. We have known that which we cannot know and be as we were in the days of our ignorance. It is the high and awful prerogative of Divine truth that it curses where it does not bless; it is a savour of death unto death, if it be not a savour of life unto life. "If I had not come and spoken unto them," said the Truth Himself, "they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." [1]

Brethren, let us hail our opportunities and make the

[1] St. John xv. 22.

most of them, and thank God for them, and for giving us the heart to use them. Christ, unseen, but ever near, is among us, did we only know it: and this is the day of our visitation, and "the things that belong to our peace" are within our reach. It will not always be so: perhaps it will not be so for long. We may be drifting into circumstances which will be beyond our control, or into states of mind which will make us insensible to the voice of God. Oh that while we may, we may be washed from our sins in the precious Blood, and really inhabited by the Eternal Spirit, and taught something day by day of the graces of the One Perfect Type of human character, and fed with "the Bread That cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world."[1] The hours pass, and they do not return; but the eternal laws do not, cannot change, and it were surely better that the All-Merciful should welcome our free self-surrender at His blessed feet to-day than that He should lament over our reprobacy to-morrow.

[1] St. John vi. 23.

SERMON XVII.

THE TIME OF VISITATION.

St. Luke xix. 44.

Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

THERE is a saying of a well-known divine quoted in the *Christian Year*[1] which is well worth remembering. It is, that Holy Scripture is like a good portrait, which seems to keep its eye on you as you move about the room on the walls of which it is hung. The truth of this saying becomes clearer to us as we get older, and know, on the one hand, more of human life and human nature, and, on the other, more of the true meaning of the Bible. It is a saying which, from the nature of the case, applies with different degrees of force to different parts of the Bible; but many of us must feel that it applies with especial fitness to the Gospel for to-day.[2] This is one of those Gospels which will bear preaching on year after year, since it is too many-sided and too full of serious meaning ever to pall upon the spiritual taste. As year by year the passing months bring us to the tenth Sunday after Trinity, and we pause before this wonderful Gospel, and mark the tears of Christ, and listen to His words uttered over the old Jerusalem on the eve of its doom, we cannot but perceive a larger and larger meaning attaching to it as it is interpreted more and more fully

[1] Cf. *The Christian Year*: Hymn for St. Bartholomew's Day, note *a*.

[2] *i.e.* The Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

by our larger experience. And thus it says more to young men than to boys, and more to the middle-aged than to the young, and more to the old than to the middle-aged. Its deep and awful import is verified, for those who think at all, by the events of life, and by the lessons of history; although, of course, this verification cannot add to its intrinsic truth, but only to our sense of it. Like those scenes of mountain beauty, or those masterpieces of art in foreign lands which so many of our countrymen are now hurrying to visit, it may be, for a second or third time in their lives, this passage must be visited again and again if we are to do it any sort of justice. We feel the fascination of the picture's eye before we can account for it to ourselves at all satisfactorily; and, as a rule, the music of our Lord's words has long been treasured in memory before we begin to appreciate their bearing upon the life of man.

I.

"Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

They are the closing words of our Lord's lament over Jerusalem. As, on His way from Bethany, He crossed the Mount of Olives, and began to descend towards the valley of the Kedron, the city came into view. He did not speak at once: it was only when He had "come near"—that is, had descended a slight declivity, and then had mounted an intervening ridge which for the moment had hidden the city from His eyes,—that He paused, as if to rest, on what travellers describe as a ledge of smooth rock. Thence He beheld the city, allowing His eyes to rest on it with deliberation, first on one and then on another of its sacred sites; reviewing, no doubt, by a rapid but perfect glance of His mind, the whole course of its eventful history. And then "He wept over it"; not by impulse of uncontrollable feeling, but because

He willed to weep. He wept by an action just as deliberate as that by which He "beheld" it lying out before Him. And then at last He spoke: and the point of His words, and therefore, no doubt, the cause of His tears, was not so much the coming destruction of Jerusalem as the reason for its destruction;—not the ruin and collapse of the temple, but that which had rendered it inevitable. "Thou knewest not," He said, "the time of thy visitation."

Read over our Lord's words and you will see that this is the governing thought in them. Twice He refers to the ignorance of the visitation—of the things that belonged to Jerusalem's peace; this cause of the coming doom introduces and closes the sentences in which the doom is itself described. First comes the sorrowing regret: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." And then follows the stern prediction of a threefold woe: "For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another." And why? The reason which follows condenses the substance of the opening words: "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

"Thy visitation." What was the event which He thus described?

A visitation is, properly speaking, an overlooking; that is the meaning of the original word. It is thus used to describe the office of an Apostle in the Acts of the Apostles, and the office of bishop in St. Paul's first Epistle to Timothy; and from this employment of the word in Scripture it has come to be applied to the court, for such

it is, which from time to time a modern bishop is bound to hold by the old law of the Church, in order to review the state of his diocese. But the word is more commonly applied to God's activity than to man's; and a visitation of God is sometimes penal or judicial, and sometimes a season of grace and mercy. "The day of visitation" of which St. Peter speaks, in which the heathen shall glorify God for the good works of Christians, is, we cannot doubt, the day of Judgment;[1] and Job uses the Hebrew equivalent to describe the heavy trials which had been sent to test his patience.[2] On the other hand, in the language of Scripture, God visits in grace and mercy, as He did the Israelites in Egypt after Joseph's death;[3] as He visited Sarah in one generation and Hannah in another;[4] as He "visited His flock," to use Zechariah's expression, in Babylon.[5] It was such a visitation as this that our Lord has in view; He Himself had held it, and when He spoke it was not yet concluded.

This aspect of His Incarnation, as a Divine visitation of Israel, had been celebrated in prophecy: "After many days thou shalt be visited," so ran Ezekiel's promise;[6] "The Lord Whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple," so sang Malachi.[7] And when Christ was born the *Benedictus* arose around His cradle: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people"; "Through the tender mercy of our God, the Day-star from on high hath visited us";[8] and the popular voice at one time echoed the words of the temple poet: "A great prophet," men cried, "hath risen up among us; and God hath visited His people."[9]

Yes, Israel had been visited from on high, and Christ

[1] 1 St. Pet. ii. 12. [2] Job x. 12. [3] Gen. l. 24.
[4] Gen. xxi. 1.; 1 Sam. ii. 21. [5] Zech. x. 3. [6] Ezek. xxxviii. 8.
[7] Mal. iii. 1. [8] St. Luke i. 68, 78. [9] *Ib.* vii. 16.

Himself was the Visitor. He passed Israel in review before Him. He visited each class of the population, all the departments and energies of the national life. The actual rulers of the land, Herod and Pilate; the Roman centurion, and the farmer of the Roman taxes; the great religious teachers, the Rabbins; the priesthood, its chiefs and its subordinates; the lawyers and scribes, who played so great a part in the later life of Israel; the religious sects, Pharisees and Sadducees, and the political religionists, the Herodians;—these one after another passed before Him. Nor was His inspection confined to the well-to-do or the influential; for He spent much of His time and effort among the common people. In their towns and villages, in their homes and in their occupations, in their joys and in their sorrows,—at a wedding feast in Cana, and by the funeral bier at Nain,—He was constantly among them, as it were holding His court and giving them opportunities of doing Him homage. It was a visitation for all Israel; but it was especially a visitation for Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, the place chosen of God to put His Name there; Jerusalem, the city of David; Jerusalem, the seat and centre of the ancient and covenanted worship, challenged the inspection of His just and merciful eye, as did no other place in Palestine; and its streets, its palaces, its population, its schools of law and divinity, above all, its temple and services, were successively examined. Presently all would be over; the visitation would be ended by the Death of the Visitor in agony and shame. And He Himself already thinks of it as over; and after the manner of the ancient prophets anticipates as present a future which has not yet arrived, and treats the present moment as already of the past. He places Himself in thought in the midst of the city now beleaguered by the legions of Titus, and hastening to its fall. "Thou knowest not," He cries, "the time of thy visitation." Thy visitation!

Let us remark two characteristics of this visitation of Jerusalem by its true Monarch. It was unobtrusive, and it was final.

(*a*) The visitation of Jerusalem by Christ our Lord was unobtrusive. There was nothing of the outward pageant of royalty to greet the Son of David; there were no guards, no palace or throne, no royal livery, no currency bearing the King's image and superscription. All these things had passed into the hands of the foreign conqueror, or in parts of the country into the hands of princes who had the semblance of independence without its reality. There was not even the circumstance and state which attends the reception of a visitor to some modern institution,—a visitor who only represents the majesty of an old prerogative, or of an earthly ruler. As He, Israel's true King, visits Jerusalem, He almost reminds us of the descendant of an ancient and fallen family returning in secret to the old home of the race. Everything is for him instinct with memories, every stone is dear to him, while he is himself forgotten. He wanders about unnoticed, unobserved, or with only such notice as courtesy may accord to a presumed stranger; he is living amidst thoughts which are altogether unshared by the men whom he meets, as he moves silently and sadly among the records of the past. He passes away from sight, as he came, with his real station and character unrecognised —if indeed he is not dismissed, as an upstart, with contempt and insult. So it was with Jerusalem and the Divine Visitor: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."[1]

It may be asked whether the unobtrusive character of His visit does not excuse the ignorance of Jerusalem. My brethren, there is ignorance and ignorance. There is ignorance which we cannot help, which is part of our

[1] St. John i. 11.

circumstances in this world, and imposed on us by Providence, and such ignorance as this, so far as it extends, does efface responsibility. God will never hold us accountable for knowledge which, as He knows, was out of our reach. But there is also ignorance,—and a great deal of it in many lives,—for which we are ourselves responsible, and which would not have embarrassed us now if we had made the best of our opportunities in past times. And just as a man who, being drunk, commits a street outrage, is held to be responsible for the outrage which he committed without knowing what he was doing, because he is undoubtedly responsible for getting into this condition of brutal insensibility; so God holds us all to be accountable for an ignorance which He knows to be due to our own neglect. This was the case with the men of Jerusalem at that day. Had they studied their prophecies earnestly and sincerely, had they refused to surrender themselves to political dreams which flattered their self-love and coloured all their thoughts and hopes, they would have seen in Jesus of Nazareth the Divine Visitor Whose coming Israel had for long ages been expecting. As it was, His approach was too unobtrusive for a generation which looked forward to a visible triumph over visible foes; they knew not the time of their visitation.

(β) And the visitation of Jerusalem was final. It was not to be repeated. "God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers" of the Jewish race, "by the prophets, in these last days spoke by His Son."[1] That was His last word to the chosen people; the last probation; the last opportunity. We may reverently say that there was no more to be done; each prophet had contributed something which others could not; each had filled a place in the long series of visitations which no

[1] Heb. i. 1, 2.

other could fill. Already long since Jerusalem had been even destroyed after a great neglected opportunity. The Book of Jeremiah, which we have lately been reading in the daily lessons, is one long and pathetic commentary on the blindness and obstinacy of king, priests, prophets, and people, which preceded the Chaldaic invasion, and rendered it inevitable. Still, that ruin had been followed by a reconstruction: that long and bitter exile by a return. But history will not go on for ever repeating events which contradict probability. One greater visitation awaited Jerusalem; one more utter ruin;—and it was the last.

"Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." What is the explanation of that "because"? What is the connection as between cause and effect which it suggests?

Does it mean merely that the Jews, having as a people rejected Christ, were punished by the destruction of their city and temple, but that nothing further can be said; —that the punishment was independent of the crime, although not excessive;—and that it might just as easily as not have been something else, since the punishment was inflicted from without by the Roman army, which, consisting of brave and disciplined Pagans, could have no ideas about the spiritual history or responsibilities of a distant Asiatic race?

No, brethren, this is not the full or true account of the case. Here, as elsewhere, God works by laws which we may trace, and which are not, as a rule, superseded by agencies of a different character. Jerusalem's ignorance of its visitation by the King Messiah had a great deal to do with Jerusalem's ruin. What was the main cause of that ignorance? It was, as has been said, that the Jews were under the influence of a false and blinding ambition: they had made up their minds that Messiah was to be a political rather than a spiritual King; He was to make

Jerusalem the centre of an empire which would hold its own against the legions of Rome. With this overmastering prejudice in their minds, the Jews could not recognise the real Messiah when He came; the day of their visitation escaped them. Yet it was this same political frenzy of theirs which ultimately got them into trouble with the Roman power; and if they had understood the real meaning of their prophecies, had seen in Messiah a spiritual Monarch, and had accepted Him when He came, the mind of the people would have taken a totally different direction, and the fatal collision with the armies of Rome would not have taken place.

II.

The subject suggests a wide range of applications. Let us confine ourselves to a few of the most obvious.

"Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

(*a*) Our Lord's words account, first of all, for the decay and ruin of nations. Nations have in all ages, as Jerusalem had of yore, their day of visitation. All seems to be going smoothly; there is peace on the frontier, and apparent prosperity at home: yet there is something rotten that does not meet the eye. So it was with the great empire of Rome under more than one of her later rulers; so it was with France during an earlier part of the last century, when she was swiftly moving on, as we know now, into the whirlpool of the Revolution. At these quiet times some act of justice is pressed upon the national conscience by a great writer or by a great minister. Some moral or social reform of vital importance to the wellbeing of the people is advocated by an authority whose claims are beyond dispute. Some measure of precaution against possible danger is recommended; some fatal prejudice, some variety of popular

infatuation, leading directly on the road to ruin, is deprecated in terms which should rouse the conscience of the country. This is "the day of visitation." It comes. It lasts only for a time. It passes, and is disregarded. And then, after a time, comes the penalty: the popular war, or the delirium of revolution, or the ostentatious collapse of all that means virtue in national life, until at last the enemy casts his trench around the doomed community, and compasses it round, and lays it even with the ground; and all is over. And on some ruin, perchance, faith guides the hand of history while she traces the words, "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

(β) Our Lord's saying explains the decay and fall of Churches. As a whole, the Church of Christ cannot fail: our Lord has promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. But particular Churches may fail—only too easily. Where are those seven Churches of Asia now whose names live for ever in the pages of the Apocalypse, and to which such solemn warnings were addressed by our Risen Lord Himself? They are most of them little better than a heap of ruins; what once was so fair and beautiful has long been trodden down beneath the feet of the infidel. Where are now those Churches of Northern Africa which, during the first four centuries, played so great a part in the history of Christendom? They had their day of prosperity; they had their day of visitation; and they were laid waste by the Vandal and the Moor. Nay, more, what was the case with the Church of Rome at the beginning of the sixteenth century? The best and saintliest minds in her knew full well that there was much that needed improvement. There was nothing to be said for such rulers as Alexander VI.; for such enterprises as Tetzel's sale of indulgences; for fictions which were known to be fictions, yet which were

still treated as truths. The revival of learning had disinterred from libraries the fair vision of the Church of the first Christian ages; and men could not but feel that it was in many ways unlike the Church of their own day. Had a serious effort been made and persevered in to restore this purer and nobler past, it is probable that the great disruption of Western Christendom which followed would never have taken place, or, if it had taken place, would soon have been ended. The visitation came; but they who wielded authority never really heeded it. They played with the spirit of reform, as though it had no real justification in Scripture or in history, and was merely an eccentric variety of the spirit of rebellion; they hoped that it would die away, spend itself, and be forgotten; they would wait and see. And so it gathered strength, and passed beyond their control; and half of Europe forthwith broke away, or was made to break away, from the old Western Church.

(γ) "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Have the words no application in more recent times, and nearer home? It is not difficult to some of us here to recall the case of a great English University which, now nearly fifty years ago, was the scene of the most remarkable religious movement of modern times. The movement was, I say, essentially religious; it was an effort to recall men to the full meaning of the Christian Creed, and to the fervour and devotion of the Christian life in the first ages of the Church. But it had many aspects and effects beyond; it influenced not merely conduct and faith, but speculation, literature, art, history. It threw a new light on the meaning of the Prayer-Book; a new awe and hope into the study of the Bible. It looked backward to ages that had passed and been forgotten; but it also looked forward to the coming times, and cherished warm hopes of progress and improvement.

Especially it did this,—it pointed out to those who would listen and think that storms were in the air; that new forms of thought hostile to the old faith of the Church were on their way to England; that if the inevitable changes were to be met and carried through in a manner friendly to the Christian Creed, it must be by men who had firmly based their thought and life on ancient Christianity, and to whom the Christian life and Creed was a matter of the first importance.

And what happened? What was the welcome accorded to this vigorous and fruitful movement? The authorities of the place, with few exceptions, first one and then another, took up their parable against it. Its promoters were told to go elsewhere, or to tone down what they had to say, to the popular standard. They were treated not as friends who could do a service, but as opponents whose words and acts should only be regarded with suspicion; they were for long systematically excluded from all places of usefulness and influence; they were pursued with invective, denunciation, ridicule, sarcasm. And, to a certain extent, the opposition triumphed: some of the best men of the movement wandered away to another Church which knew how to welcome and honour them; while over a large number there crept a temper of indifference and lassitude, a despair of all that had seemed to be within reach, a return to the old, dull, lifeless spirit which had preceded the movement.

And, since then, the old law has repeated itself. The day of visitation was neglected, and then came the day of Jerusalem. All that the opponents of the movement would themselves have valued, or nearly all, has perished. The keen genius, the intrepid faith, the stern self-discipline which could have held its own against negative forms of thought, has been, at least in a large measure, withdrawn: and we may shortly live to see what has been a

home of the Church for a thousand years become a place of purely secular instruction which might have been founded last week by a company of shareholders.

(δ) Individual life is not less illustrative of the truth before us. We know what a man means when, speaking of his bodily health, he tells us that he has had a warning. He means that some symptom of latent disease has shown itself;—some unsuspected weakness in the system, some failure of strength which points to greater care respecting diet, or exercise, or sleep, or work. And if no attention is paid to the warning, we need not be doctors in order to know what sooner or later will follow. So in the moral and spiritual life. God's ways of visiting us are many; but there are two in particular which it is well to bear in mind.

One is, a friendship:—the influence of a powerful character, granted us for a few years or less, and then withdrawn. We never noticed how that friendship came about. Events led to the acquaintance, and the acquaintance became an intimacy; and then death, or change of circumstances, or of home, put an end to it. It was at the time difficult, so we say, to see in it anything remarkable,—all was so natural and commonplace; and yet, as we look back, we can see clearly that it was remarkable. A real influence has been withdrawn, designed, as we can now see, to enforce on us some neglected truth, to cure us of some serious fault, to make some vital difference in the direction of life or in the ingredients of character. It has been withdrawn; the day of our visitation has passed. And the question for us is, With what result?

Another such visitation is a serious illness. There are two ways of looking at an illness: we may trace it to its second or immediate cause,—an infection, a blood-poisoning, an imprudence, an hereditary taint,—and there stop;

or we may, with greater reason, look to Him Who is Lord of all second causes, and Who "worketh all things by the counsel of His own will."[1] And if we do this last, we must see in an illness a visitation from God. He knows what we want; He sees that in us which will never be corrected in the days of rude health and high spirits;—the insensibility to the seriousness of life, to the claims of others, to the true interests of the soul, to the love of the Divine Redeemer. An illness gives time for prayer, for reflection, for resolutions; it is a school of discipline. Illness is to thousands one of the greatest blessings in life; yet its significance may easily be missed; and then no such visitation may be vouchsafed again. Those who have never had bad health are, it has been said, objects of anxiety; those who have had it, and are never the better for it, are certainly objects of the very deepest concern and compassion.

There was a story, many years since, of a boat which was getting near the rapids above the Falls of Niagara. The boatmen managed to reach the shore; but, disregarding advice which was earnestly given them, they put out again into the stream, with the object of crossing to the opposite bank. The current proved too strong for them, and those who had warned them of their danger looked on with a distress too great for words, while the boat glided on with ever-increasing speed to the edge of the Falls. It is possible, in what concerns another life, to be in that condition;—to have ignored God's last word of warning, and to be hurrying onwards under the stress of influences which we cannot any longer resist, towards the awful future. Great reason is there for prayer that, at the critical turning-points of our career, we may have eyes to see, and ears to hear, that we may distinguish God's visitations in life from what is ordinary in it; that

[1] Eph. i. 11.

we may remember that in every life, even the most highly favoured, there is, sooner or later, a visitation which is the last!

"O Saviour of the world, Who by Thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed us, Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord."

SERMON XVIII.

THE DOOM OF JERUSALEM.

St. Luke xix. 44.

Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

THIS Gospel[1] carries us back to Palm Sunday. It fixes our attention on a single incident of that solemn entry into Jerusalem which our Lord made just before He suffered.

The exact scene of no circumstance in our Lord's life can be more certainly determined than that of His weeping over Jerusalem. He was on His way to the Feast of the Passover. He had walked up the long, steep, desolate road which leads to Jerusalem from Jericho. He slept one night at Bethany, in the highly-favoured home of Mary and Martha, to whom, by His great miracle, He had lately restored their brother Lazarus. In the morning He would move on leisurely towards Jerusalem. He was accompanied by a crowd of pilgrims and disciples, whose enthusiasm was raised to the highest pitch by all that they had seen and heard in Bethany respecting the raising of Lazarus. And He was met by another crowd, made up of disciples and friends within Jerusalem, who also had heard of the great miracle, and who poured out of the holy city to conduct Him in triumphant procession to the festival. They probably joined Him just as He was leaving Bethany; then the whole mingled crowd of

[1] *i.e.* The Gospel for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

disciples and pilgrims turned towards Jerusalem. Within five minutes of their leaving Bethany they would have reached a ridge from which a first, very partial, view of the holy city is obtained. From this point Zion and the tomb of David are visible, while the buildings in the temple area and everything beyond are hidden behind the southern spur of the Mount of Olives. On this first ridge of the road Dean Stanley is probably right in placing the scene of the singing of the hymn, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Here the men from Jericho and Bethany laid down their outer garments in the path of the advancing Redeemer; here the men from Jerusalem strewed the palm branches which they had cut from the gardens south-west of the Mount of Olives on their way from the holy city in the early morning. But this first ridge was soon crossed: and then the road descends sharply to the right, so as to wind round the head of a deep valley that runs into the southern side of the Mount of Olives. It winds round the valley, and then turns to the left, and climbs up along the side of the spur of the Mount just now referred to, and at the top it turns again to the right, before beginning the descent into the valley of the Kedron. This last piece of the road would have been traversed by a slowly-moving procession in about half-an-hour, and the time was probably occupied by repeated singing of the hymn, "Hosanna to the Son of David." When the second ridge was reached, the occurrence described by St. Luke took place; for this second ridge of the road between Bethany and Jerusalem commands the most complete of any of the views of the holy city. On the left of the spectator is the Mount of Offence, with its sad memories of the shrines to Chemosh and Milcom, which led to the fall of Solomon; on the right is the third and southernmost summit of the Mount of Olives, covering that great subterranean sepulchre which tradi-

tion terms "the tombs of the prophets." In front, the ground, all incrusted with Jewish tombstones, sinks by a steep descent down, past the tomb of Absalom, into the deep valley of the Kedron: and along the opposite ridge rises the eastern wall of the holy city and of the ancient sanctuary. The modern traveller, indeed, sees rising above the wall of the sanctuary the domes of the two great mosques, which, alas! now stand within that sacred enclosure; he hardly sees the dome of the Church of the Sepulchre behind; but even for him nature and art between them form a picture which, once beheld, can never be forgotten. When our Lord gazed on it, it was certainly fairer than it is now. Behind the city there rose villas and gardens, that were shortly afterwards, before the siege, enclosed within the so-called Third Wall; the hill of Zion was crowned with palatial edifices, to which nothing now corresponds; while the temple and its surrounding buildings stood forth in all their beauty—a beauty which certainly, in some respects, even exceeded that of the days of Solomon. Herod had greatly enlarged the temple area; Greek marbles and Greek artists drew forth the exclamations of the Galilean disciples, "Master, what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"[1] and the sacred edifice itself, with its burnished roof and lofty towers, had been scrupulously restored, so far as the fabric went, to the full measure of the splendour of its earlier days. In this spot, in this building, were concentrated the great memories of God's first revelation of Himself to man; here most assuredly centred all the religious feelings that were most tender and most intense in ancient Israel. As the procession reached this striking point of view, the ancient words must have risen to many memories, to many lips: "The hill of Sion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth: upon the north-side lieth

[1] St. Mark xiii. 1.

the city of the Great King."[1] "Jerusalem is built as a city, that is at unity in itself."[2] "In God's temple doth every man speak of His honour."[3] "My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: . . . blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be always praising Thee."[4]

I.

Here, before this sight of surpassing interest and beauty, our Lord paused. "He beheld the city." His eyes gaze, as it seems, intently on the towers, walls, palaces, and temple which make it what it is. He beholds the city: and as He beholds, His eyes fill with tears. For He sees not merely the scene before Him, which others around Him also see; He sees another scene which will be witnessed on this very spot in less than forty years. He sees six Roman legions encamped around the fair city; one of them on the Mount of Olives itself. He sees the Roman soldiers throwing up a stockade, not merely on the level northern and western, but even on the steep southern and eastern sides; and then—sadder far—He watches the fierce implacable factions struggling for mastery within the walls; His eye follows the desperate sallies of the besieged; the progress of the besiegers, steady, persistent, resistless; the agony which the inevitable famine inflicted on the vast poverty-stricken multitude cooped up within those narrow precincts; the emaciated corpses of the dead thrown over the walls to the Roman soldiers; the crucifixion by the Romans of multitudes of fugitives; the capture, first of the third wall, then of the second; then the fierce struggle round the very gates of the temple, the burning of the temple, the last desperate resistance on the heights of Zion, until at last fire and the sword had done

[1] Ps. xlviii. 2.
[2] *Ib.* cxxii. 3.
[3] *Ib.* xxix. 8.
[4] *Ib.* lxxxiv. 2, 4.

their work, and Jerusalem is a heap of ruins smouldering over the bodies of thousands of Jews. All this and more passed before His soul: and then followed the solemn words: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

II.

What was "the visitation," "the time" of which Jerusalem knew not?

The idea of visitation implying some special intervention on God's part in the affairs of men is common to both Testaments. It is natural to expect such interventions if we believe that the world is surveyed and governed by a living Being Who is at once Almighty and All-holy. The extraordinary thing would be, if, being what He is, He could behold this dark and intricate scene of human life, and yet refrain from doing something to bless, to improve, to warn, to condemn, as the case might be. An Epicurean deity, sitting apart, careless of human misery, of human sin, of human struggles, is not the Being Whom we name God. God, the True and Only God, is, before all things Love, Justice, Sanctity; He is a Moral Being; and if we did not know that such a sentence as, "Shall I not visit for these things?" was His word, we might have anticipated it.

God's visitations are connected in Holy Scripture with various motives.

1. The common use of the word associates it with

judgment; with the judicial infliction of punishment of some sort. Thus the Second Commandment speaks of God's visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children; and a late psalmist cries in agony, "Stand up, O Lord God of hosts, to visit all the heathen."[1] And God says of the unfaithful house of David, that He "will visit their offences with the rod, and their sin with scourges."[2] In this sense Moses, when describing the sentence upon Korah, uses the expression "the visitation of all men" as equivalent to a death of an ordinary kind;[3] and Hosea explains the "days of visitation" to mean the days of recompence.[4] And, to omit other illustrations, this peculiarly solemn sense of the word survives among us in one of those religious phrases which still cling about the language of the law, as when a coroner's jury returns a verdict that a man has died "by the visitation of God." And Bishop Jeremy Taylor uses the word to signify some calamity less than death when he says, "That (in Holy Scripture) which thou dost not understand when thou readest, thou shalt understand in the day of thy visitation. For many secrets of religion are not perceived till they be felt, and are not felt but in the day of a great calamity."

2. But Divine visitations are often connected with a purpose of blessing. God is said to have visited Sarah before the birth of Isaac,[5] and Hannah before the birth of Samuel.[6] The dying patriarch assures his descendants in Egypt, "God will surely visit you,"[7] and in the revelation made to Moses at the vision of the burning bush, the Lord said unto him, "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you."[8] And thus a psalmist

[1] Ps. lix. 5.
[2] *Ib.* lxxxix. 32.
[3] Numb. xvi. 29.
[4] Hos. ix. 7.
[5] Gen. xxi. 1.
[6] 1 Sam. ii. 21.
[7] Gen. l. 24.
[8] Exod. iv. 15.

prays just after the capture of the holy city by the Chaldeans, "O Lord, look down from heaven, behold, and visit this vine," "it is burnt with fire, and cut down."[1] Nay, God sometimes visits in giving us the fruits of the earth in due season. Naomi, living in Moab, had heard in the religious language of Israel that, after the famine, "the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread";[2] and another psalmist says, in words which just now rise often to our memories, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it, and makest it very plenteous."[3] This sense of visitation as an occasion of blessing may be illustrated by the fine saying of Hooker's, that "the most comfortable visitations God hath sent men from above, have taken especially the times of prayer as their most natural opportunities."[4]

3. Once more, visitation means warning:—a meaning which is intermediate between that of blessing and of judgment. In this sense the Psalmist speaks of God proving and visiting his heart in the night-season:[5] and perhaps in this sense Job exclaims: "Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit";[6] and it is in this sense that our Lord describes His own ministry as the visitation of Jerusalem. Partly, no doubt, it was a visitation of judgment; our Lord judged the scribes and priests and Pharisees, though His judgment was not final. Yet more was it a visitation of blessing: it brought with it instruction, grace, pardon; and thus Zacharias says of it: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people"; and he extolled "the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Day-star from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."[7] Thus also, after the raising of the widow's son outside the gate of

[1] Ps. lxxx. 14, 16. [2] Ruth i. 6. [3] Ps. lxv. 9. [4] *Eccl. Pol.* v. 23.
[5] Ps. xvii. 3. [6] Job x. 12. [7] St. Luke i. 68, 78, 79.

Nain, St. Luke repeats two sayings which were repeated by the bystanders: "That a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited His people."[1] Indeed, as the Incarnate Son, our Lord visited His people in an altogether unique sense; "grace and truth"[2] came by Him as by none before Him, from their very Fountain-head. But His visitation was also a warning. This aspect of His ministry was prefigured remarkably by that of Jeremiah, who, beyond any other prophet, is the prophet of Divine visitation. It was a warning against some besetting sins of old and settled religions,—against formalism and hypocrisy, against the insincere use of sacred language against the insincere performance of sacred duties. But it was also a warning specially addressed to the people of Israel against missing the whole providential drift of their religious past, against taking a fatally wrong turn in their thoughts and aspirations and efforts for the future. It was this aspect of our Lord's ministry especially,—the time of warning visitation—"the time" of which Jerusalem knew not.

III.

Why, it may be asked, should the failure to know the time of a visitation from above be followed by such grave consequences?

The answer is, first, because such failure implies a deadness of spiritual interest, which in those who have had religious training and opportunities is culpable. To believe sincerely in a living God Who interests Himself in His moral creatures, is to be on the look-out for tokens of His intervention in the affairs of men,—in other words, for His visitations. When a Divine visitation comes it is a touchstone of the state of souls. It finds some anxious, expectant, willing to recognise and to make the most of

[1] St. Luke vii. 16. [2] St. John i. 14.

it; and others, as our Lord said, "whose hearts have waxed gross, and whose ears are dull of hearing, and whose eyes are closed."[1] This insensibility to the approach of God in His love and power wounds the heart of God; it is a bad return for gifts such as are knowledge and conscience; it cannot but have stern consequences beyond itself.

Moreover, this insensibility to God's approach is not only to be accounted for by the spiritual deadness of those whom He visits; it generally implies that they are preoccupied with some other interest which for them is more engrossing. Poor indeed must any lesser interest be in rivalry with the infinite God. "They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which will hold no water."[2] But, for all that, men do thus yield to the creature that place in the heart and thought which was meant for the Creator; and as a consequence, when the Creator visits them, He is overlooked or neglected. The Jews of our Lord's day had not, like their predecessors, forsaken the true God for Baalim and Ashtaroth, but they had cherished worldly and political ambitions which had had the same effect as a formal idolatry. "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?"[3] And God is, as the Second Commandment says, a jealous God; we cannot thus forsake Him for anything else with impunity.

Further, if God visits in warning, to neglect His visitation is to neglect conditions of safety against future dangers. So it was with the Jews. If the Jews had given heed to the teaching of our Lord, the conflict with the Roman authority which issued in the destruction of Jerusalem would never have occurred. That conflict was, at any rate to a great extent, the result of the manner in

[1] St. Matt. xiii. 15. [2] Jer. ii. 13. [3] St. John v. 44.

which the Jews misunderstood the prophecies and promises of their ancient Scriptures. The true fulfilment of those prophecies and promises was a spiritual one, and one of the objects of our Lord's visitation of His people was to make this plain to them. If they had accepted Him as their King, yet as a King Whose kingdom was not of this world, they would have escaped from the false ideals and worldly hopes which kept them in a fever-dream of national independence, and so brought them into conflict with the masters of the great World-Empire. As it was, they clung passionately to their false interpretations; and for many years every Syrian fanatic or free-lance who had a mind to dabble in the troubled waters of political rebellion had a ready access to their sympathies. And thus the words were fulfilled: "Thine enemies shall lay thee even with the ground, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

IV.

The difficulty for many men is to recognise, at the critical moment, the fact that God is visiting them. All seems so ordinary, so commonplace, so like what has happened to ourselves before, so like what is happening to others now. Was it not thus eighteen centuries ago with Jerusalem in her day of visitation? To her the Prophet of Nazareth seemed at best only one of a long series of prophets; He had had many predecessors. His were not the first miracles, the first instructions, the first denunciations, the first warnings that had been heard or witnessed within those ancient walls. Prophets were to be expected; they were a natural product of the higher genius of the race: they were not all of them equally authoritative, equally entitled to deference. The difficulty was to see in this event, this visitation, its exceptional significance;—something more than the natural product

of an immediate antecedent or cause;—a distinct evidence of the working presence of that Love and Wisdom which rules the world, and which is intervening with a serious purpose on man's behalf.

The most vitally important days or weeks in the history of a soul may have little to distinguish them outwardly from other days or weeks. It needs an earnest, penetrating recognition of God's incessant and loving interest in His creatures to read life aright—whether it be corporate or individual life:—to see the moral and spiritual worth of events, to catch the hints, and to interpret the movements which are from beyond the veil of sense. Our Lord once told His hearers that they could predict the weather of the following day from the appearances of the sky at sunset, but that they could not read the signs of the times;—that they had no eye for the moral and spiritual world. We must know only too well that the men of His day have in this, as in so many other respects, their successors among,—it may be in, ourselves.

It may be said, Surely there is room for a great deal of illusion in this matter of Divine visitations. We may easily think ourselves more important people than we are; we may imagine that the events of our little lives have a meaning which does not belong to them. God may be visiting us, but it is at least possible that He may not. Is there any test or criterion of His visitations, any safeguard against the illusions to which we may be a prey?

Well, my brethren, we have first of all to remember that no human life at any moment is other than an object of the deepest interest to God. He Who made, Who has redeemed, Who sanctifies us, does not think any life too insignificant to be visited by Him. "The hairs of your head are all numbered." It is impossible that the Infinite Love should ever despise the work of His own hands.

There is no ground for the idea that we are making too large an assumption in supposing that our little lives are objects of deep interest to the Infinite God; it is really an unworthy and anthropomorphic conception of God which would doubt this. The only question is whether we are warranted in thinking that His interest and oversight, always vigilant, has at a given time reached a special climax or visitation, having exceptional claims on our attention. We are justified in thinking that this is the case, if the truth which such a visitation enforces is in correspondence with the highest truth we have learnt before, though perhaps going beyond it; and if the conduct to which we are impelled or encouraged involves self-denial or something which is unwelcome or exacting. It would have cost Jerusalem something to have known practically the time of her visitation; but to have done so would have been in complete accordance with the teaching of the Law and the Prophets, and would have averted her impending doom.

V.

"The time of thy visitation." That is an expression which should sink deep into our memories and thoughts. For it implies that every visitation of God comes at a predestined time; that it comes, and passes, and does not return. So it is with societies of men, with nations, with Churches. They have their great heaven-sent opportunities, for which their previous history is a preparation, and which they may fail to recognise and to make the most of.

God visits a nation when, at a critical moment of its history, He bids it maintain an imperilled principle, or do a great act of justice, or abolish some ancient cruelty or abuse. Perhaps the opportunity has been

neglected; it passes; and then the sentence of national decline and fall is written on the page of history, with the added reason, "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

And God visits, at His own time, the several branches of His Church; it may be after long years of apathy and deadness. He visits a Church when He raises up in her teachers who insist upon forgotten aspects of truth; who call men from false standards of life and thought, modern and worldly, to apostolic rules of living and believing; or when He opens great opportunities of extending His kingdom and of influencing numbers of human beings to seek the things that belong to their eternal peace. And if this invitation to better things is set aside,—nominally, perhaps, as if it were the revival of some old errors or superstitions, but really because it makes an unwelcome demand upon the conscience and the will,—then the day of visitation passes, and the old deadness and apathy return, and the doom of that Church, which comes with time, is justified in the after conscience even of its children,—"Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Once more, souls are the units of which Churches and nations are composed; and God visits a soul when He brings before it a new vision of truth or duty, a new range of opportunities, a new endowment of force as well as insight, at some time to which all that precedes has led up, and from which all that follows depends in its solemn history. Individual souls were visited in the course of our Lord's ministry no less than was Jerusalem. So it was with Simon and Andrew, when Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, said unto them, "Follow Me." So it was with Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom, when Jesus, passing by, said unto him, "Follow Me." So it was with the man who, being called, pleaded that he might first go and bury

his father, and to whom Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their dead." So with another, who asked that he might first bid them farewell which were at home at his house, to whom Jesus said that "no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." So it was with the young ruler, who, when he was bidden "sell that he had, and give to the poor," "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

One of yourselves, we will say, has been for years recognising just so much of religious truth as the people about him, and no more; giving just so much thought to it, and no more; acting just so far upon the duties which it suggests, and no further. Your thought and practice are, as we say, conventional,—that is to say, they are determined by the average feeling of those among whom you are thrown, and not by any personal sense or grasp of religious principle, of what religious truth is, and what is due to the Infinite and Everlasting God. And then something occurs which appeals to the soul as nothing has appealed to it before;—which puts life, destiny, duty, truth, Holy Scripture, the Person of Christ, the Cross of Christ, the Sacraments of Christ, the Church of Christ, before it in quite a new light. It may be a sentence in a letter; or a sudden thought which takes possession of you at the time of prayer. It may be a friend who insists on truths and duties which have hitherto been mere phrases to you, and in so clear and convincing a way that you cannot dismiss the new and importunate impression. It may be that you suddenly find yourself obliged to decide between two courses,—one involving sacrifice more or less painful, the other the surrender of what conscience tells you is right and true; and the having to make this decision puts a strain on your moral being,—nerves, thrills, quickens it,—is itself a visitation. Or one who has been intimately associated with you for many years has died. His death

has unveiled to you for the time the unseen and eternal world; it has taught you the emptiness of this passing life and the supreme duty of making the Unchangeable God the stay of your soul. It has put you out of heart with the half-hearted religion of your past years; you now see that much which you took for God's service was really a service of the world or a service of self. In short, this trial, while it presses heavily on your heart, has gone far to make you other than you were; and this again is a visitation. God is speaking to your soul, and much depends on your understanding Him, and resolving, and acting, and refashioning your life accordingly.

Much depends, I say, on this. For be sure that it is very serious to have enjoyed such a religious opportunity, and yet to have neglected it. No Divine visitation leaves us where it found us: it always leaves us better or worse; if not better, then certainly worse. To have been in contact with truth or grace, and to have put it from us, is to be weaker, poorer,—worse off, religiously speaking,—than we were. When the Divine visitation of the soul has been refused, the day of its enemies has arrived; the legions of hell encamp around it; the powers of darkness make sure of their victim by those walls of circumvallation which precede the last assault.

There is such a thing as the last chance in the life of the soul. God knows when it is passed by each of us; but one day, most certainly, we all of us do, in whatever way, pass it. There are souls for whom our Lord and Saviour, in the fulness of His compassion, shed His Blood, yet whose doom He will, as their Judge, one day utter; and the reason of that doom will be because they knew not the time of their visitation.

May our Lord of His great mercy condescend to visit us in this our day of life, revealing Himself to us more and more clearly, enabling us to understand what He is doing,

giving us eyes to see and ears to hear,—giving us senses so quickened and spiritualised as to reach beyond the range of our daily outward lives into the world that is invisible. "Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God; let Thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness."[1]

[1] Ps. cxliii. 10.

SERMON XIX.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE.

St. Luke xix. 45, 46.

And He went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.

DURING the course of His short earthly ministry our Lord Jesus Christ twice cleansed the temple of the traffic that took place within its courts. St. John describes the first occasion; he places it just after the wedding of Cana in Galilee, when our Lord went up to Jerusalem to keep the first Passover after entering on His ministry. The second occasion is narrated by the three first Evangelists;—by St. Matthew perhaps most fully, by St. Luke, as in the text, most briefly. This last occasion took place immediately after the public entry into Jerusalem, and, as St. Mark's account would seem to imply, on the following morning. The close of the ministry of the Son of Man was to be marked by a solemn act corresponding to that at its commencement.

And here observe, in passing, that it is impossible to treat the narrative in St. John as referring to the same event as that described by the three first Gospels, without supposing that the fourth Evangelist had, for purposes of his own, torn away this episode from its true place at the close of our Lord's life, and placed it at the commencement. Those who have gone so far as to maintain this, contend that it is very im-

probable that an event of such marked character should have occurred twice within a short lifetime. But, not to insist on the unwisdom of settling beforehand what is or is not likely in such a life as our Lord's, let us observe that the action itself, and the language used by our Lord, are reported to have varied significantly on the two occasions, while the recurrence of the circumstances which provoked our Lord's act on the first occasion would have led Him to repeat it on the second. He could not, without inconsistency, condone at the close of His ministry what He had rebuked at its opening.

Just as similar cases of disease led Him more than once to repeat a miracle, and similar faults, or errors, or ignorances in His hearers led Him to utter in a later discourse words which He had already employed in an earlier one, so, when, in full view of His approaching Death, He beheld within the temple-courts the same unhallowed traffic which had met His eye in the first year of His ministry, He acted in the main as He had acted before,—He drove the buyers and sellers from the sacred precincts. And those who believe that every event—the least as well as the greatest,—in the life of the Son of God upon earth was prearranged for the instruction and edification of the world, will feel that this solemn repetition of an act of severity and judgment shows it to have some emphatic lessons which it is our duty to consider attentively.

I.

The occasion presented itself, as I have said, naturally. Arrived at Jerusalem, our Lord, it has been well said, "once more treads the path which He had loved as a child, up to the temple." In the outer court He finds a brisk trade going on around Him. Nothing is said on this occasion of the sale of oxen and sheep for sacrifice, which

St. John mentions at the earlier date; but there were stands of doves, in much request for trespass, sin, and burnt offerings (since the poor were allowed to present them instead of a lamb or kid); and the money-changers, who must have had constant occupation. Every Israelite, in whatever station of life, when he had passed the age of twenty, was bound by the law to pay a half-shekel into the sacred treasury whenever the nation was numbered—a tax which in time seems to have become annual. This tribute had to be paid in the exact Hebrew half-shekel, worth about fifteenpence-halfpenny of our money; and the premium upon the exchange of foreign money for this sum was a coin worth about three-halfpence. But the money-brokers of our Lord's time had no notion of contenting themselves with this small commission; Jews came to them from all parts of the world who were obliged to make their offering in the Hebrew coin, and the changers only supplied the necessary half-shekels for the largest sum that after driving a bargain they could exact. It was these fraudulent brokers who so moved our Lord's indignation. He passed rapidly along the court, upsetting their tables, money and all, one after another; He then overturned the dove-stands; and finally, by the mere exercise of His moral authority, He drove the whole company of bargainers, buyers and sellers alike, from the temple-court. In doing this He appealed to a word of the great prophet Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." "Instead of that," He sternly exclaimed, "Ye have made it a den of thieves."

In contemplating this action we are at first sight startled by its peremptoriness. Is this, we say to ourselves, He Who is called the Lamb of God,—He of Whom prophecy said that He should neither strive nor cry,—He Who said of Himself, "I am meek and lowly of heart"? Is there

not some incongruity between that meek and gentle character and these vehement acts and words? No, my brethren, there is no incongruity. As the anger which is divorced from meekness is but unsanctified passion, so the meekness which can never kindle at the sight of wrong, into indignation is closely allied to moral collapse. One of the worst things that the Psalmist can say of a man is, "Neither doth he abhor any thing that is evil."[1] Bishop Butler has shown that anger, being a part of our natural constitution, is intended by our Maker to be excited by and exercised upon certain legitimate objects; the reason why anger is generally sinful is because it is generally wielded, not by our sense of absolute right, but by our self-love, and therefore on wrong or needless occasions. Our Lord's swift indignation was just as much part of His perfect sanctity as His silent meekness in the hours of His Passion. We may dare to say that He could not, being Himself, have been silent in that temple-court. For that which met His eye was an offence, first, against the eighth commandment of the Decalogue;—the money-brokers were habitually fraudulent. But this does not explain His treatment of the doves, which shows that He saw in the whole transaction an offence against the first and second commandments. All irreverence is really, at bottom, unbelief. The first great truth that we know is the solitary supremacy of the Eternal God; the second—its consequence—the exacting character of His love. God is said in the second commandment to be a jealous God. In a man jealousy, impatience of rival claims, impatience of a divided love in another, is, as we know, anything but lovely: and our reason for condemning it is that no one human heart has, in justice, a right to the undivided homage of another human heart, or to anything more than a share of it. Of course, I know that on cer-

[1] Ps. xxxvi. 4.

tain occasions people use passionate and exaggerated language which might imply the contrary; but in morality and fact, no man may claim all the affections and thoughts of any other human being. But that which is a grave fault in a finite and created being like man is anything but a blemish,—it is a strict moral necessity,—in the character of God. God has, while man has not, a literal right to the undivided homage of His creatures. As the End no less than the Author of our being, as containing within Himself all perfections, as being the highest and consummate Good, God has a right to, not a part, but the whole affections of His creatures. He would disclaim His own perfection if He could claim less than the whole of any human heart. His exacting love, which has wandered forth from the glories of heaven to the cradle of Bethlehem and the Cross of Calvary, in quest of the soul of man, would be untrue to man's best interests, no less than to His own Beauty and Supremacy, if it could consent to share His claims on the human heart with any creature whatever. And this was the deepest meaning of our Lord's protest against the irreverent traffic in the temple. Though that traffic seemed to have a semi-religious purpose, it was in reality irreligious; it was the substitution of another interest for that of which the temple was the symbol and guardian. "My house shall be called a house"—not of commerce, though it be semi-sacred commerce—but "of prayer," which has Me for its object and Me alone. Ye are robbing—not your fellow-creatures only of their substance—but Me of my glory; "ye have made it a den of thieves."

II.

Brethren, the application of this action and language of our Lord must detain us a little longer.

(*a*) "My house." The Jewish temple is, in the Bible,

first of all a figure of the whole Church of the Redeemed. The faithful, St. Peter says, "are a spiritual house."[1] They are "Christ's own house," says St. Paul, over which as the Son, He is set.[2] "Ye are the temple of God," St. Paul says plainly to the Corinthians; "the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."[3] Of this spiritual house Christ is the chief Corner-stone, and the apostles and prophets are the foundation; and day by day and year by year souls are, in Scripture language, being built into its walls; and when its predestined proportions have been attained, the end will come. This vast organised edifice of souls, to which all ages, all countries of the world, the living and the dead, alike contribute, touches us in the shape of the militant or visible Church, which is only a fragment of a mighty whole stretching back into the past,—stretching away into the unseen. "Ye are come," by becoming Christians, says the Apostle,—not merely to such and such congregations or churches, bishops, pastors,—but "unto Mount Sion, and to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the First Born, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant."[4]

Of this house it is true, "My house shall be called the house of prayer for all nations." For this it is constructed as its leading purpose—the maintenance of uninterrupted communion with the eternal Source of Life. And this is as true of that portion of the whole body which we call the Church visible or militant as of the rest. Its object is not solely philanthropy; although the Church's duty is "to do good unto all men, specially those of the household of faith." It is not solely the moral perfection of its members: although the purification to Himself of "a peculiar people, zealous of good works" was a main aim of

[1] 1 St. Pet. ii. 5. [2] Heb. iii. 6. [3] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. [4] Heb. xii. 22, 24.

its Founder. Still less is it the prosecution of inquiry or speculation about God; we know all that we ever shall know about Him in this state of existence; we have "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." This mighty temple of souls—visible and invisible—is organised thus throughout earth and heaven to be a house of ceaseless communion with God. And as its heavenly members never cease in their blessed work above, so, by prayers and intercessions, and thanksgiving and praise—private and public, mental and vocal—"the Holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Him" Who is the common Centre of light and love to all its members, whether on this side the veil or beyond it.

Into this temple, also, there sometimes intrudes that which moves the holy anger of the Son of Man. For this spiritual society has its place among men; it is in the world although not of it; and it thus sometimes admits within its courts that which cannot bear the glance of the All-Holy. Especially is this apt to be the case when the Church of Christ has been for many ages bound up with the life and history of a great nation, and is what we call in modern language "established,"—that is to say, recognised by the State, and secured in its property and position by legal enactment. I am far from denying that this state of things is a blessing; that it secures to religion a prominence and consideration among the people at large which might else be wanting to it; that it visibly asserts before men the true place of God, as the Ruler and Guide of national destiny. Yet it is also undeniable that such a state of things may bring with it dangers which less favoured Churches escape; to be forewarned, let us hope, is to be forearmed. But if it ever happen to a great Church or to its foremost rulers to think more of the secular side of its position than of the spiritual; more of a seat in the senate and high social rank than of the work

of God among the masses of the people; if, in order to save income and position in times of real or supposed peril, there is a willingness to barter away the very safeguards of the Faith, or to silence the pleadings of generosity and justice in deference to uninstructed clamour; then be sure that, unless history is at fault as well as Scripture, we may listen for the footfalls of the Son of Man on the outer threshold of the temple, and we shall not long listen in vain. Churches are disestablished and disendowed,—to the eye of sense, through the action of political parties,—to the eye of faith, by His interference Who ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, and Who rules us at this moment on the same principles as those which of old led Him to cleanse the temple in Jerusalem.

(β) "My house shall be called the house of prayer." Here, too, is a law for the furniture and equipment, here a definition of the object and purpose, of a material Christian Church. There are differences, no doubt, between the Jewish temple and a building dedicated to Christian worship; but over the portal of each might be traced with equal propriety the words, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." No well instructed, no really spiritual Christian thinks of his parish church mainly or chiefly as a place for hearing sermons. Sermons are of great service, especially when people are making their first acquaintance with practical Christianity; and they occupy so great a place in the Acts of the Apostles because they were the instrument with which the first teachers of Christianity made their way among unconverted Jews and heathens. Nay more, since amid the importunities of this world of sense and time, the soul of man is constantly tending to close its eyes to the Unseen, to the dangers which so immediately beset it, to the pre-eminent claims of its Redeemer and its God, sermons

which repeat with unwearying earnestness the same solemn certainties about God and man, about the Person and work and gifts of Jesus Christ, about life and death, about the fleeting present and the endless future, are a vital feature in the activity of every Christian Church;—a means of calling the unbelieving and careless to the foot of the Cross, and of strengthening and edifying the faithful. Still, if a comparison is to be instituted between prayers and sermons, there ought to be no doubt as to the decision. It is not said, "My house shall be called a house of preaching"; but "My house shall be called a house of prayer." Surely it is a much more responsible act, and, let me add, a much greater privilege to speak to God, whether in prayer or praise, than to listen to what a fellow-sinner can tell you about Him. And when a great congregation is really joining in worship;—when there is, as it were, an electric, a deep spiritual, current of sympathy traversing a multitude of souls as they make one combined advance to the steps of the eternal Throne, then if we could look at these things with angels' eyes, we should see something far greater, according to all the laws of true spiritual measurement, than the most eloquent and persuasive of sermons. "My house shall be called the house of prayer" is true for all time.

And if this be so, then all that meets the eye, or that falls upon the ear, within the sacred walls, should be in harmony with this high intention, and should be valued and used with a view to promoting it. Architecture, painting, mural decoration and the like are only in place when they lift the soul upwards towards the invisible, when they conduct it swiftly and surely to the gate of the world of spirits, and then retire from thought and view. Music, the most pathetic and suggestive, is only welcome within the temples of Christ when it gives wings to spiritualised thought and feeling, when it promotes the

ascent of the soul to God. If these beautiful arts detain men on their own account among the things of sense; if we are thinking more of the music than of Him Whose glory it heralds, more of beauty of form or colour than of Him Whose temple it adorns, then be sure we are robbing God of His glory; we are turning His temple into a den of thieves. No error is without its element of truth; and jealousy on this point was the strength of Puritanism which made it a power, notwithstanding all its violence and falsehood. And as for purely secular conversation, how unworthy it is of a Christian Church! Time was, under the two first Stuarts, when the nave of old St. Paul's was a rendezvous for business, for pleasure, for public gossip, so that Evelyn, lamenting the deplorable state to which the great church was reduced, says that it was made a stable of horses, and a den of thieves. Is it too much to say that the Redeemer was not long in punishing the desecration of His temple? First came the axes and hammers of the Rebellion, then the fierce swift tongues of fire in 1666, and the finest cathedral that England ever saw went its way! Would that, in better times, we were less frequently unmindful of the truth that its successor is neither a museum of sculpture nor a concert-room, and that He, Whose house it is, will not be robbed of His rights with permanent impunity.

(γ) "My house shall be called the house of prayer." This is true also of each regenerate soul. When in a state of grace the soul of man is a temple of God's presence. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."[1] Christ throned within the soul enlightens the understanding, kindles the affections, braces the will; and while He thus, from the presence-chamber

[1] St. John xiv. 23.

in this His spiritual palace, issues His orders to its thinking and acting powers, He receives in return the homage of love and sacrifice which they delight to present to Him.

So it is with God's true servants, but, alas! my brethren, if you and I are to compare notes, what shall we say? Even when we desire to pray we find ourselves in the outer court of the soul, surrounded by the tables of the money-brokers, and the seats of those who sell doves. Our business, with all its details, follows us into the presence of God. Our preparations for religious service occupy the attention which is due to that service itself. Sometimes indeed, alas! we do not even try to make those first steps towards prayer which faith and reverence suggest; we lounge and look about us as though nothing were of less importance than addressing the infinite and eternal God. But sometimes also we close the eyes, we bend the knee, we try to put force on the soul's powers and faculties, and lead them forth to the footstool of the King of kings, when, lo! they linger over this memory or that; they are burdened with this or that load of cares utterly foreign to the work in hand; they bend in the Sacred Presence, beneath—not their sense of its majesty, but the vast and incongruous weight of worldliness that prevents their realising it.

When a soul is at its best moments thus fatally troubled and burdened about many things, God bides His time; He cleanses the courts of a temple which He had predestined to be His for ever; He cleanses it in His own time and way. He sends some sharp sorrow which sweeps from the mind all thoughts save one,—the nothingness and vanity of all that is here below,—and so forces it to look to Himself Who alone can satisfy it. Or He lays a man on the bed of sickness, leaving the mind intact, but stripping from the body all the powers of speech and

motion. Then during the long weary hours a man is turned in upon himself, and if there is any hope for him at all, if, at that critical moment, he is at all alive to the tender pleadings of the All-Merciful, he with his own hands cleanses the temple. He sees the paltriness of the trifles that have kept him back from his chiefest and only good; he expels first one and then another unworthy intruder upon the sacred ground; the scourge is sharp, the resistance persevering, the hours long and weary, but it is done at last: "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: yet at the last it bringeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby."[1]

Let us pray for grace lest we should need this scourge; —for grace that if we do need we should welcome it. If religion means anything, it is an awful and absorbing reality; if attention to its duties has any claim upon our powers, that claim is too serious to admit of rivalry or interruption. Let us be sure that, in this solemn matter, what is worth doing at all is worth the best care and effort that we can possibly give it, and that for the rest, if we ask Him, God will so "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love Him, and worthily magnify His holy Name through Jesus Christ our Lord."

[1] Heb. xii. 11.

SERMON XX.

TRUE GREATNESS.

St. Luke xxii. 24, 25.

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so.

OF St. Bartholomew the Apostle himself little is known. His own proper name—for Bartholomew means only the son of Tolmai—does not occur in the three first Gospels; but there are serious reasons for believing that he is the Nathanael of St. John's Gospel, who was brought to Jesus by Philip,—the Nathanael of whom our Lord said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," and the Nathanael to whom, among others, after His Resurrection, He showed Himself at the Sea of Tiberias. According to the current opinion of the ancient Church of Christ, he preached the Gospel in Arabia Felix; and although this rests upon less considerable probabilities, he ended his life by undergoing a cruel martyrdom in Armenia.

The difficulties of being quite certain that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person, probably explain the fact that in the Epistle and Gospel appointed in the Prayer-Book for to-day there is nothing peculiar to this Apostle himself. He is remembered in the Epistle as one of the twelve by whose hands, in those early days which succeeded Pentecost, many signs and wonders were wrought among the people; in the Gospel, as one of the twelve

among whom on the eve of the Passion there had been a strife which should be accounted the greatest. This last is the point which I invite you to consider this afternoon. For it is a help to us, my brethren,—to you and to me,—to remember that the Apostles of Christ did not become all at once what they were eventually. They had to struggle with the weakness and errors of a fallen nature, just as we have. Like us, they had to curb temper and to check ambition; they did not begin by sitting on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel; they carried their treasure full many a year in earthen vessels, that the excellency of their glory might be of God, and not of themselves.

The question of their individual importance or greatness seems early to have engrossed the attention of our Lord's first disciples. St. Matthew alone records three discussions on the subject. Thus on one occasion the disciples formally asked our Lord who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He answered by taking a little child, and telling them that unless their self-assertion was curbed and they became simple and childlike, they could not even enter the kingdom.[1] Again, when the sons of Zebedee asked that they might sit on the right and left hand of Christ in His kingdom, and He told them that, if they joined Him at all they must make up their minds to drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism, the other ten (St. Matthew says) were moved with indignation against the two brethren. Our Lord then rebuked them almost in the same terms as those in to-day's Gospel. They were not to be like the princes of the Gentiles, eagerly grasping at honour and power; in the new kingdom the measure of service was the measure of greatness.[2] So when speaking to the multitude and His disciples, after the successive controversies with the Sadducees, the lawyer, and the

[1] St. Matt. xviii. 1-3. [2] *Ib.* xx. 20-28.

Pharisees in the temple, our Lord warned them not to be called Rabbi and Master, after the current Jewish fashion, because the greatest among them was to be the servant of the rest.[1] The controversy then that was raised among the Apostles just before our Lord's Passion, as described in to-day's Gospel, was not by any means a new one: and the judgment which our Lord passed upon it had been given, at least in substance, before. This however shows its importance. It was not for nothing, we may be sure, that our Lord, Whose whole ministry was comprised in three years, and of Whose acts and words only a few are preserved in the Gospels, is recorded to have spoken so often and so earnestly on this subject.

I.

What did the Apostles at that time in their lives mean by "the greatest"? They meant, no doubt, the most influential, the most considered, the most capable of having his own way and bending other wills to his: and, further, they meant the first in honour as well as the first in power, the admitted chief and leader of the rest,—as such, "accounted the greatest." It was greatness on a small scale, from the point of view of a Roman noble or statesman, but it was just the same sort of greatness, in its kind and principle; it was, in its essence, the enhancement, the aggrandisement of self. To be an Apostle, they already thought, was something; to be the first Apostle was to be a considerable personage; and the place was therefore worth a struggle.

What greatness consists in is a point upon which a man changes his mind very greatly at different periods of his life, and upon which human society pronounces very different judgments at different stages of its development. A boy, for instance, sees greatness, at first at any rate, in bodily strength; an ordinary man sees it in the possession

[1] St. Matt. xxiii. 8-12.

of wealth, or perhaps in intellectual capacity; an older man sees it in that combination of circumstances and qualities which imply social or political power. But at bottom, the great man is, in all of these estimates, the man who is considered, whose power goes to aggrandise himself in the estimate of his contemporaries. It is not otherwise in the successive judgments of human society.

(*a*) By "greatness," I say, societies of men mean, first of all, physical prowess. This is the meaning which is attached to the word by barbarous tribes; by men whose life is most nearly modelled on the pattern of animals. Just as the strong sinewy animal is the natural king of the herd, and makes his royalty felt, whenever it is necessary, by exerting his strength, so it is with men in the rudest stage of human life. A Goliath of Gath is naturally the great man among the Philistines, simply because he is huge and strong. So too it is with boys at school; each generation repeats upon a small scale the experiences of human society in the course of ages. The great boy at school is first of all the strong boy; the boy who can do more with his legs and arms than any of the rest; the boy who can keep the others in order, or anyhow make them do what he likes, because they know that he is stronger than they are, and do not wish to fight him. This too is the notion of greatness which prevails in the interior of Africa: to be great there is to be physically strong—an athlete, in short, with no scruples about making others know and feel it.

(*β*) But as soon as human life moves out of its very rudest stages, and becomes in any way organised into a society, this idea of greatness is thrown into the background by another. One of the first efforts of society in its infancy is to assert and to protect the rights of property; —those rights in the absence of which human life resolves itself into a perpetual scramble or struggle such

as we may see among the wild animals at feeding-time in a menagerie. In order to protect the rights of property, something of the nature of law is necessary, however liable this may be to being disturbed by the irruptions of caprice or force. And when society has reached this point, the great man is, as a rule, the rich man. Wealth is a form, a very considerable form, of power: it will do a great deal more than personal prowess, because it can buy and employ the strength of many others. This was what struck the imagination and the reason of the Queen of Sheba, when she paid her famous visit to Solomon: his various and extraordinary wealth meant, she knew, power —power which made itself felt throughout the Eastern world. And this is not less true of states where there is a purely popular government: wealthy citizens in the Greek republics of antiquity, and in the Italian republics of the middle ages, were generally powerful citizens; and we do not need to be told that a Londoner who has a large income can, if he likes, become a very powerful person; the labour which he employs, the public objects which he promotes, the place which he fills in the imagination as well as in the life of the English people, mean power— power of a legitimate, I may say, of an inevitable kind.

(γ) But a new and a more serious element of greatness soon makes itself felt with the growth of society. Wealth is acquired, it is made the most of, it is retained, by intelligence. In the long-run, ideas are found to be stronger than muscles, stronger even than wealth. To be muscular, but uninformed and stupid, is to be permanently great only in the very rudest stage of civilisation. To be wealthy, but uninformed and stupid, is to have wealth shorn of most of the elements which assert its power; it is to hold it, too possibly, upon sufferance. Solomon's wisdom, or rather the lower department of it, collected and secured his wealth, and made his wealth

subservient to his power. And the more complex society is, the greater is the power of intelligence: the more does the well-informed and active-minded man tend to become the great man. The consideration which is given to high intelligence in a country is a fair measure of its social progress. When the great man is not chiefly the athlete, nor yet the millionaire, but the thinker, man is certainly moving on, so far as this lower world is concerned, towards a better estimate of the true capacities of his life.

(δ) When, however, we speak of greatness in modern times, we often mean a combination of all of these forms of power,—of force, wealth, and intelligence. It is the having, or the being able to command these, which makes up social greatness. Every executive government, be it a presidency of a republic or a monarchy, must have at its disposal the hand, the purse, the brain of the nation if it is to govern well: it must control the national forces, and the national taxation and expenditure, and, if it can, it must lead or be in sympathy with the national mind. And this same combination goes to make up greatness, as we use the word in the world, in private life. A man who can bring social force, wealth, and high intelligence to bear upon any object which he has at heart, will always pass for a great man in the world's current language, if only because, whether for good or evil, he can leave his mark conspicuously upon it.

Now, it was this complex social or political greatness which was in our Lord's thought when He spoke to the Apostles on the eve of the Passion. "The kings of the Gentiles," He says—He does not care to allude by a more exact and particular description to the existing master of the Roman empire, Tiberius; He is looking backwards and forwards into the wide expanse of history, and speaking for past and future time,—"The kings of the Gentiles

exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors." The word translated "benefactors" was actually applied to one of the greatest of the Egyptian successors of Alexander the Great, and, a few years after our Lord spoke, to the Roman Emperor Caligula. But the spirit of the epithet surrounds all human thrones, all purely human conceptions of government and greatness. The mere fact of social and political eminence, with or without high character and disinterested aims, is treated as of itself greatness and a blessing to society: to be powerful and successful, with a large majority of mankind, is to be great. Society, by the court which it pays to success, is constantly justifying the irony of the Psalmist: "So long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak well of thee." If we of this generation think less of the power of muscles than did our rude forefathers, we make up for it by thinking more of the power of wealth and the power of intelligence. It is not character, it is not willingness and capacity for service—it is the possession of one or more of the elements of social power, which looks like greatness to the mass of men; and it is to secure these fleeting and hybrid forms of greatness that men spend their days and their strength incessantly: as if a man's true end were really reached when he had succeeded in becoming—not possessed of that inward peace which comes with the knowledge and love of God,—not useful and helpful to others,—but a mere force—with so many cubic feet of social importance.

II.

"But ye shall not be so." What is the ideal of greatness which our Lord contrasts with the ideas about it which were then, and are still to a great measure, current in the

world? In order to answer this question we must give His words at length: "But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be your minister; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve: even as the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Here we are clearly face to face with an idea of greatness very unlike any which man in his natural state can form. Personal prowess, wealth, intellect, the social ascendancy which these things create and secure, are not here in question. They may indeed be made useful by real greatness; but of themselves they befit the kings of the heathen world. Real greatness consists in nothing that strikes the eye or the imagination as great, it consists in something that requires a new sense (it would almost seem) in order to appreciate it. It consists externally in service; the very thing which a purely worldly conception of greatness is most anxious to avoid:—the service of God, the service of men, the service of truth;—a service which is most splendid and imposing when it is begun, completed, and ended in suffering. It consists internally in love which perpetually prompts service, and which is fed by faith—that new sense of the soul, to which the unseen world is a constant and serious reality. And thus the highest greatness is compatible with physical weakness, with poverty of worldly goods, and even with intellectual weakness. The sickly, the poor, the uncultivated, the unconsidered, can offer service; and to serve disinterestedly and to suffer in service—this is to be really great. "He that is greatest among you, let him be your minister; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."

And here the question arises: Is this a fanciful or mystical or unpractical ideal of greatness? or is it the reasonable and the only true one? Let us consider.

1. Man's real greatness must be the greatness of his

true self,—not the greatness of anything external to himself. Great wealth, for instance, does not make a great man; because it is the greatness of something which man may control and manipulate, but which is not himself. It is, in reality, no more himself than his clothes are; and however it may be increased or diminished, he himself remains. Personal prowess, too, is not man's true greatness; because it is the greatness only of a man's animal part, and man is much more than an animal; he is, before all else, a personal being, an immortal spirit joined to a body as its organ and instrument. Even high intelligence is external to man's deepest self; the intellect, although the greatest in many ways among the natural endowments of the soul, is yet not itself the soul's centre. Every soul knows its true self-determination, its personality, to be a thing independent of and deeper than the activity of the understanding. A really great man, then, must be great in the centre of his life; great in that mastery over his will, which means his nearest likeness to the sovereign God; great, it may be, in other things, but especially great in the characteristic qualities of man as a self-governing and immortal spirit; great, that is, in something of which the grave cannot rob him,—upon which time decay, death, have no power.

2. Man's true greatness is in harmony with the true law of his being. What is that law? It is that man is a creature, that is to say, that he is not his own centre; that his life, when properly ordered, revolves round a Being to Whom he owes his existence, and upon Whom he depends for its continuance. If man were God his greatness would be seen in his self-sufficiency, his independence of all besides himself, his power of controlling others around him, his claim to and acceptance of honour in its various and most conspicuous forms. As it is, when man affects self-sufficiency, independence, empire, absolute

superiority to others, an inherent right to homage, to honour, to all the varieties of respect and consideration, he becomes, at a certain point, absurd. This was felt even in the Pagan world, in respect of some of the Roman emperors; and the reason was that, although men could not express it, they instinctively perceived that a Nero or a Domitian were forgetting the true limits and law of their existence, and exaggerating the accident of political power into a position which claimed some sort of divinity. But very far short of this, man may forget that he is man, that is to say, feeble, dependent, intended to find his excellence in service; and whenever he does forget this, he loses sight of the law of his being, of the conditions of his greatness. He can only be great as being what he is; he can only be great as man, and therefore his greatness lies, if he only knew it, in the direction of service and dependence rather than in that of self-sufficiency and command.

3. But, thirdly, although man is irreligious and absurd when he gives himself the airs which become Divine power and authority alone, he is permitted to share in the most glorious of the Divine attributes; and his share in this attribute is the measure of his greatness. What is God essentially? Not merely, or chiefly power; not merely or chiefly intellect. "God," says St. John, "is Love."[1] And love is the gift, the expenditure of self. Power alone, we may dare to say it, and intellect alone, would never have created the universe; the heavens and the earth are a product of the love of God surrounding Himself with creatures as the expression of His love, and as providing it with objects. And still less would power or intellect have alone redeemed a fallen world. Love which creates the unfallen also seeks the lost: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that who-

[1] 1 St. John iv. 8.

soever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[1]

Man then is great when he can catch in his poor and finite life some rays of that glory which is the first of God's characteristics. And if it should be asked whether, considering the gulf which separates God and the best of men, the idea of implanting any such excellence as this in the life of human beings is an idle dream, the answer is that the experiment has been tried. The true ideal of man's greatness has not, for Christians at least, been left an open question. Once, and once only, as we believe, there has appeared in human history a perfect human Life—One Who could be described without exaggeration as the Pattern Man. What was the character, the direction of that life? Certainly He made for Himself the largest claims on the love and homage of His followers; He said enough about Himself, He did enough to show us that He could not have done otherwise without being untrue. He spoke as one Whose intellect and Whose power were alike illimitable. But if He did this; if He further called men to follow Him, trust Him, love Him, obey Him; if He placed Himself by anticipation on the judgment-throne of the world, and described all the nations as gathered before Him; if He spoke of Himself as the Way, the Truth, the Life of human souls—He did more than this. First in honour and command, He would also be first in service. "I am among you," He said, "as He that serveth." He gave up His liberty; He was at the command of His followers, ready to work, to suffer, to die for them. "The Son of Man came," He said, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister: and to give His life a ransom for many." All His exertions, all His privations during His hidden and His public life, all the humiliations and sufferings of His Passion, all the profound

[1] St. John iii. 16.

self-abasement by which He made Himself obedient to the eccentricities of human wills, to the caprice and violence of human passions, to the extremities of shame and the anguish of death, was a long expression, among other things, of the intrinsic greatness and splendour of service,—of service considered as the action of love, God's most characteristic and essential attribute. It was meant to teach us that man's greatness does not consist in his strength, or his wealth, or his intelligence. The physical strength of the Crucified ebbed with His life-blood; His last earthly possessions were cast lots for by His executioners; Herod treated Him publicly as a fool when He was on His way to die. Yet His greatness remained; for His eternal strength indeed, His uncreated wealth, His clear and awful intellect, were not as men deemed, in that hour of darkness; His supreme greatness, that which was to give the law to the best human thought upon the subject, and to revolutionise the world, remained. It remained,—that consummate act of service, offered by infinite charity to the Father on high, offered on behalf of man below: and henceforth all who, by faith and love, unite themselves to it, are initiated thereby into the true secret of man's greatness, and learn practically the meaning of the precept of Christ.

The Apostles became really great men after Pentecost, simply beause they followed their Master. Each of them could say to the world, with St. Paul: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."[1] They abandoned the idea of personal pre-eminence for the idea of mutual service. They understood that man is great—not as a ruler, but as a servant: that service is in keeping with the true conditions of creaturely existence. Christ set the tone; they followed: and as a consequence they, without seeking it, obtained a perpetuity of honour which the great of the

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 1.

world seek in vain. There are no days in the year when the best and most thoughtful of the human race betake themselves to considering, honouring, the memory of its great rulers and thinkers: they pass and are forgotten. But the names of a few simple peasants live on, from age to age, in the calendar of the Church, if only to re-assert, from age to age, the true ideal of human life; if only to proclaim that it consists not in force, not in wealth, not in cultivated intelligence, but in service as the expression and triumph of love.

Let us here note two points in conclusion.

1. The importance of a true ideal in life. Some ideal, some model of what our human nature was meant to be, we must have. If we do not choose one it will be supplied to us, perhaps not from the best quarters.

We are, each one of us, moral or spiritual artists; and the first thing an artist has to do is to get clearly before his mind's eye the form of beauty which he means to render into painting or into stone. If he gets a false ideal,—a grotesque, or unseemly, or disproportioned form,—his work must correspond: he must fail. So with ourselves. We too wish, each in his way, to be great; it is an instinct of improvement planted within us by the Author of our life. But what do we mean by greatness? All depends on that. Is it merely pre-eminence in honour, and in the qualities or possessions which ordinarily secure it,—wealth, intellect, social power? Or is it pre-eminence in work,—if need be, pre-eminence in failure and disappointment, that we may serve the better? Is it Nero, the master of thirty legions, the master of the civilised world, the arbiter of life and death, bending a mighty empire to the caprice of his desire or his frivolity—the historical model of the Antichrist? Or is it Jesus, the Eternal Beauty and Wisdom of the Father, making

Himself the slave of all, offering Himself a ransom for all? They are the two ideals of human greatness which stand confronting each other in the sacred writings to the end of time; and it is of incalculable importance—I will not say, which we choose to follow—but even upon which the eye of our souls habitually rests. There have been many, like Demas, who have renounced the higher ideal of greatness for the lower one. There have been many who, like the Apostles, have renounced the lower for the higher. How is it with us now? What is it to be with us a year hence?

2. Note, secondly, that the true ideal of human life—service—is within the reach of all of us. We can all of us be really great if we will. Every position, every occupation, every household, affords opportunities for the truest greatness. If greatness consisted in the monopoly of honour, in brilliancy of intellect, in the exercise of command, it would necessarily be otherwise. The world is not roomy enough for a great many Cæsars or a great many Platos; they soon fill up what space there is to be had for empire. But there is no exhausting the true greatness of the apostolate,—the manifold, the inexhaustible possibilities of service. They lie around us on every side; they grow under our feet; they outnumber our capacities for meeting them. Everywhere there is poverty, suffering, ignorance, depression; everywhere there are broken hearts and untutored consciences; everywhere humanity lies before us, as it lay of old before the Eternal Christ—most miserable, yet most noble, and in its misery most worthy of the best service that we can place at its disposal. And as each Apostle passes across the firmament of the Church's year, he teaches us the lesson which is more particularly inculcated by the Gospel for St. Bartholomew's Day. If we are to be like our Lord, if, in the true sense of the term, we are to

be great, we must unlearn the ideas of greatness which are still current in the world,—which place it in what a man has or can control rather than in what he is. We must learn the majesty of love and service,—of a love of God, for His own sake, which is constantly ready to devote time, means, strength, self, to the service of our fellow-creatures.

SERMON XXI.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.

St. John xiv. 8, 9.

Philip saith unto Him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

OF the two Apostles to whose cherished memory to-day is consecrated in the calendar and services of the Church, St. James is, in some respects, the more distinguished. As our Lord's first-cousin or (as the Semitic idiom phrased it) brother; as the first bishop of Jerusalem; and as the author of the canonical Epistle which bears his name, St. James occupies in the New Testament at large the far more prominent position. In the Gospel history, however, St. Philip's name is of more frequent occurrence. He was converted on the day after the conversion of Andrew and Peter. A proselyte of Greek origin, as his name might seem to imply, he had passed his Jewish religious life in studying the prophecies which referred to the coming Messiah; so that when the true Messiah came he at once acknowledged Him. His first anxiety was to make his friend Nathanael (whom we know as St. Bartholomew) a sharer in his happiness, and in this we probably see a feature of his character which led our Lord to honour him with a high degree of intimacy.

Of this intimacy we find proofs in the question

addressed to Philip before the feeding the five thousand, and in the application which was made to him by some Greeks who were anxious to see our Lord at the Passover. It is possible, too, that in the scene described in the text we have another illustration of it; and St. Philip would not have interrupted our Lord with an exclamation such as that before us unless he had been allowed to feel himself perfectly at ease in His presence.

But the text has a much deeper and wider interest than this. What was the motive of Philip's words? It has been thought that his exclamation is only the expression of a rapture, too enthusiastic to admit of accurate reflection;—a rapture which was created in the soul of the Apostle at the promise and prospect just announced by our Lord of the vision of the Father. "From henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him." But to St. Chrysostom and others St. Philip's language has appeared to imply a still imperfect faith in the dignity and person of Jesus Christ Himself. There is a distinct accent of gentle reproof in our Lord's reply: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?"

This remonstrance would seem to imply a spiritual sluggishness on the part of St. Philip; a slowness to master truth which was fully within his reach. St. Philip's question was like that which is often asked by children or pupils of teachers and lecturers. The pupil has been under instruction, and has seemed to have been attentive for a considerable time; he is supposed by the teacher to have been taking in the subject which is being explained; and then, when the explanation is nearly finished, he suddenly makes a remark or asks a question which betrays a fundamental misapprehension, or shows

that the pith and substance of his lesson has altogether escaped him. Our Lord, of course, knew that this was the case with St. Philip, and He betrays nothing that can without irreverence be termed surprise; His object is to reveal St. Philip to himself, and the words in which He does this are full of meaning and import for all of us.

I.

"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?"

Observe, first, that intimacy with the phraseology, the form, the surroundings, if I may so put it, the external presence of truth is one thing, while knowledge of it is another. It is the difference between friendship and acquaintance in social life; it is the difference between knowledge of phrases and knowledge of things in the life of the understanding. Nay, more; knowledge in the Scripture sense is not merely head-knowledge—the comprehension of ideas or of facts by the mind; it is knowledge of the heart and of the will; it is something more than sight; it is the sense of spiritual touch by which the soul apprehends the reality of that which is before it. Thus the blessing which is ordered by the Church to be pronounced over the sick man in the service for Visiting the Sick in the Prayer-Book runs thus: "The Almighty Lord . . . make thee know and feel, that there is none other Name under heaven given to man, in Whom, and through Whom, thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ": and our Lord's saying that "this is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent,"[1] refer to knowledge in the deeper sense. Life eternal could not depend upon an act

[1] St. John xvii. 3.

of the bare understanding; and when a believing Christian says his Creed, his whole being, moral as well as mental, says it; "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,"[1] and the Object of his belief is a living Person, Whom, in this deeper sense, he "knows."

St. Philip had been constantly with our Lord from the day of his conversion. He had confessed Him as the true Messiah; he had heard St. Peter's confession; he had witnessed the miracles, he had listened to the discourses, he had had before his eyes the example, of his Master, yet he had not put these things together; he had not seen what such power, such wisdom, such love in their combination really implied: in our Lord's words, St. Philip had not "known" Him. He had as yet lived upon the surface of the marvellous Life before him; he had never penetrated it and seen what in its completeness it involved in the way of demand either on his understanding or on his heart.

What was it that knowledge of Jesus Christ implied over and above accurate observation of that which met the eyes of those who lived with Him? No attentive reader of St. John's Gospel can be at a loss to answer this question. St. John's Gospel was written, not simply with a view to adding a fourth and supplementary narrative to the three Lives of our Lord already possessed by the Church; it was intended especially to bring out into view and to establish one great truth. It was to be not so much a history as a doctrinal treatise; its purpose was to show that in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, Reason, or Son of God had taken a bodily and human form, and had manifested Himself to the senses and minds of men. From the vast materials at his disposal, and stored up affectionately in his memory, St. John selected those precise sayings and acts of Jesus Christ which especially

[1] Rom. x. 10.

make this plain; in each miracle which he describes, in each discourse which he chronicles, the Life or the Light of the Eternal Word flows forth from His Divine Person, and enables us, if we will, to come into spiritual contact with Him. Thus it is that St. John begins his Gospel by stating that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[1] Then he notes how the Word is also the Son, and how "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we" men "beheld His glory."[2] And at the end of his Gospel he gives his motive for writing it: "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name."[3]

Not that St. John was putting before the Church a view of Christ's Person of which the earlier Evangelists were ignorant. To give one example: our Lord's saying that "no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son,"—a saying quoted both in St. Matthew and St. Luke,[4]—covers the whole ground taken in St. John's Gospel. It implies a reciprocal equality of knowledge on the part of the Father and the Son, to assert which would be unintelligible or blasphemous unless the Person of the Son was in the absolute sense as Divine and Eternal as that of the Father. But although there is nothing approaching to doctrinal opposition between the teaching of the Evangelists respecting our Lord's Person, it is true that there is, so to call it, a distribution of labour in the tasks assigned them. The three first Gospels present us with three separate aspects of our Lord's Human Nature, the fourth with the majesty and beauty of His Divine Nature. And it is in penetrating beyond and beneath the human, and in apprehending the Divine, the seat and root of Christ's personal existence,

[1] St. John i. 1. [2] *Ib.* 14. [3] *Ib.* xx. 31.
[4] St. Matt. xi. 27; St. Luke x. 22.

that souls "know" Jesus Christ, whether in the apostolic days or in our own. Hence our Lord's words, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"

II.

Observe, secondly, in our Lord's words, that this "knowledge" is final; it is meant to satisfy the human soul. St. Philip seems to have thought that after seeing Jesus Christ and knowing Him, there was a further unveiling of truth in store for the Apostles, some coming vision of the Father to which they had not yet attained. Our Lord rules that "to have seen Him is to have seen the Father." The Life of God was perfectly displayed in the Life of Jesus Christ; and nothing further was in reserve. God had not merely spoken, but He had said His last and fullest word to man in the Revelation of His Son. This is in keeping with the Apostolic language that "the faith has been once for all delivered to the saints";[1] that "now once in the end of the world had Christ appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."[2] Christianity makes many other claims; but one claim which it makes peremptorily beyond all others is this: that no religion containing higher truth will ever be presented to the soul of man; that the faith of Jesus Christ is at once absolute and final.

And yet in our day too the cry "Shew us the Father" is raised in such a sense as to imply that there are grounds for supposing that more will be known of Him by man in future ages than was revealed by Jesus Christ. "Why," men ask, "should not Religion make progress like other things,—like Science?

[1] St. Jude 3. [2] Heb. ix. 26.

Science made a great step beyond the Middle Ages with Bacon; she made another in the last century with Newton; she has moved forward in our own day not less wonderfully under the guidance of names which most assuredly will live in memory. Why should Religion be at a standstill while all else is moving forward? Why on the highest of all subjects of interest should we have no materials to work upon beyond those which were possessed by men nineteen centuries ago?" The answer is, that this result follows from the very fact of a revelation given once for all. In giving us His Son, God placed religion upon a totally different footing from all other matters of human interest. We men only find out the laws which govern the universe in which we live, the properties and elements of the various objects of sense around us, by the slow and painful travail of our minds exercised on these matters century after century. Too happy are we if, in our short day of labour, we can add anything of value to the accumulated stores bequeathed us from the past, or can correct any traditional misapprehensions or errors which disfigure them. But in the life of Jesus Christ all possible discoveries of the reason or moral sense of man about God and destiny were anticipated, and more than anticipated; they were altogether exceeded. A flash of heavenly light in Palestine superseded the need for any further human guesses, or human observations, addressed to the study of nature and man. Jesus Christ appeared; henceforth man had only to know *Him*,—not "after the flesh," as St. Paul knew Him at first, but in His Divine and Eternal Person, as St. Paul knew Him after his conversion. In knowing Jesus Christ man reaches the highest attainable religious knowledge; he already knows the Father.

It is true that questions may be raised, and are debated between Christians and Christians as to what is or is not

involved or included in this one perfect revelation of the Mind of God. But in supposing that another revelation will ever be given, or that the human conscience will elaborate some new and higher religion for itself, a man breaks altogether with Christianity. To have seen Christ is to have seen the Father. To expect that the Father will one day be revealed more perfectly than now is to deny the very first and most characteristic claim which Jesus Christ makes upon the faith of Christians.

Brethren, Jesus Christ has been with us Englishmen as a nation for at least some sixteen or seventeen hundred years. As a nation, do we know Him? Are our laws, —our marriage laws, our poor laws, for instance,—all of them, in clear agreement with His law of high and pure morality? Are our habits, our great currents of opinion, our national enthusiasms and aversions, such as become His disciples? Is He our King, not merely recognised in our temples, but honoured in our streets, in our organs of national opinion and feeling, in our great representative assemblies, in our halls of science as well as in our sanctuaries? Do we, as a nation, feel that in educating our children our first duty is to teach them to know and to love Him; or are we tampering with educational projects which treat Him as if He were a mere name of the past, unworthy to compare with the real things of time and sense, the "useful knowledge," as we call it, which is all that we can, some of us, agree to teach? Are there, at this moment, or are there not, in this metropolis, none who have never heard His Name? Are there none who have heard about Him all their lives, yet who make no efforts whatever to treat Him as a living and omnipotent Friend, and to spread the knowledge and the love of Him among their fellow-citizens?

Ay! there are perchance some in this cathedral to whose consciences He says at this moment: "Have I been

so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" "I have been with you in the earliest lessons which you learnt at a mother's knee; with you in the advice you received from friends and masters; with you in the enthusiasms of youth, and in the stern experiences of manhood; I have been with you in the pages of your Bible, in the teaching and services of My Church, in the grace and power of My Sacraments; I have spoken to your reason, to your conscience, even to your imagination, by the records of My will, and by the voices of My servants; I have sent to you My Spirit, that He might make you at once sensitive and strong,—sensitive to the claims of truth and duty, and strong in upholding the one and carrying out the other. Above all, My Blood is a fountain which is ever open in My Church for your sin and your uncleanness, and I am with you alway, even unto the end. Do you know Me? Am I more to you than a shadow of the past,—a beautiful and interesting shadow, you would say, yet only a shadow? Am I only a memory which you occasionally disinter from an ancient literature, a memory to which you reach across eighteen centuries, and which has, as you think, no business to enter into competition with the solid interests of the present hour? Or am I to you, what I am in fact, a present and living Person;—living and present, although you do not see My form with your bodily eyes or listen to My voice with your ear of sense, yet Whom you hear in the recesses of your spiritual being, yet Whom not having seen you love?"

No question can be more important than this for each and all of us. And if it should be that we cannot answer it as Christians would wish to answer it, must we not endeavour to decide why it is that Jesus Christ has been long with us, without our knowing Him?

1. One reason may be that there has been on our part

no effort really to know Him. There has been nothing of that earnest grappling of the understanding with the highest truth which the Bible calls "seeking" it. Jesus Christ has been here, but we have been passive, listless, uninterested. His words have played over the surface of sense or the surface of thought; we have made no struggle to master them, to explain what seem to be difficulties in them, to co-ordinate and form them into a consistent whole. And the consequence has been that we have never possessed religious truth as an actual and living thing; it has been to us a series of phrases and nothing more. Each phrase has appeared, not like a new light playing on the countenance of a living friend and revealing his soul and character, but only as the husk of a dead dogma, which to our higher knowledge is worse than uninteresting. And thus perhaps we have come to think cheaply of creeds which express the living and working faith of all that is purest and truest in Christendom. And yet there are moments when we wish it was otherwise. We see believers; we cannot help envying them. We cannot bridge the chasm which separates us from them; yet we cannot, when we think steadily and deeply on life and destiny, but feel that they have a something which is utterly lost to us.

Believe it, brethren, truth is hidden from those who do not seek it. Truth does not force itself upon us, and take us by storm; it does not unveil itself to those who grumble periodically about the hardness of reaching it; it presents itself, and it gives us the opportunity of knowing it; but it exerts no violence upon us; and it fades from our view if we do not reach forth our hands to grasp it. It is the "treasure hid in the field," for which all might well be abandoned; it is "the pearl of great price," of which the merchantman gets tidings, and for which he sells his all. It is within our reach: but it demands high effort and

sacrifice. "Those that seek Me early shall find Me."[1] Not to seek is to forfeit all prospects of finding; it is to live with the eye gazing on the Divine life or on the creed of the saints with stupid indifference, such as an animal might feel in presence of a work of high art.

2. A second reason may be that although some truths have been really mastered by the mind, they have never been embraced by the heart and will. They have never, so to speak, passed into the system; they have never been looked at as hard and important fact is looked upon; they have never been acted on. But we can only retain a hold on religious truth by acting on it; because it is really held at least as much by the will as by the understanding. There is no danger of our forgetting that Sicily is an island when we once have learnt it, unless our memories are intolerably bad; and the reason is that no moral duty or practice depends upon our recollecting it. But every properly religious truth implies moral duties; and we are therefore, perhaps unconsciously, interested in losing sight of it; our will is interested in weakening and damaging the retentive power of our understandings. When the seed falls upon the stony ground, it is quite natural that the fowls of the air should devour it. Every religious truth, believed, but not acted on, is in a fair way to be forgotten: we make religious truths really our own, and mount by and through them to higher truths beyond, by staking a venture upon them. However small may be a man's creed, let him make the most of it. Does he believe at all that a Moral God Who is Love and Justice rules this world? let him pray. Does he believe seriously in the power of prayer? let him pray much. Does he set much store upon acts of charity and kindliness? let him lose no opportunity of doing them. Does he admit that there is a world beyond the grave? let him see that in some real sense he lives for

[1] Prov. viii. 17.

it. One truth acted on leads us on to other truths which are connected with it, and which as yet we see not. Half the floating scepticism of our day has its roots, not in anything that can be dignified with the name of intellectual anguish;—it is due only to moral inconsistency.

Jesus Christ is known now, as of old, by those who practically make the most of the first rudiments of their knowledge about Him. He is misapprehended or forgotten by those who treat a religious conviction as if it were a line of poetry,—a thing to be referred to gracefully now and then, but utterly remote from practical interests and ruling motives.

3. A third reason for this shadowy Christianity, and one common to these two preceding, is the absence of moral earnestness. It is moral earnestness which seeks truth, and which, having found, applies and holds it. It is the absence of this which makes the finest gifts of mind useless, or worse than useless. This is observable in matters of worldly conduct and duty. Who of us has not seen minds of the highest order lie by the roadside of life, utterly unproductive: unable to use great opportunities, unable to rise to the average level of duty, unable to hold their own against utterly inferior men, from the lack of one moral enthusiasm, pure and strong, capable of rousing them to action and endurance?

During the first years of the present century the German poet and thinker Goethe was perhaps on the whole the most cultivated man in Europe. Especially did Goethe impersonate and represent educated Germany; and even in his lifetime he received from his countrymen the ready honour which is too often given to great men only after their death. Goethe reached the height of his reputation just when Germany lay prostrate before Napoleon. It was after Tilsit,—when Austria had been vanquished, Prussia crushed, Russia held at bay; when it seemed as

if, at least on the European continent, no human power could dispute the empire of civilisation with Napoleon. Yet there were brave hearts in Germany who mourned over all the evils and wrongs of their country; and there were associations founded by civilians with no other object than that of restoring in due time its best independence. It was at this critical time, when the Spanish insurrection had just kindled hope in all the friends of freedom, that Goethe attended the court of Napoleon at Weimar, and submitted to be complimented by the man who had enslaved his country, and to receive at his hands the decoration of the Legion of Honour. That act was felt throughout Germany to be a revelation of the moral impotence of its highest intellectual culture; it filled the hearts of that generation of Germans with pain and shame. It was very well, they thought, to be brilliant and original; it was better to remember that a good man owes duties to his country which, under certain circumstances, cannot be ignored without moral degradation.

And it is this absence of moral earnestness which explains the attitude of many an educated man in our day towards Jesus Christ. There is no heart to know Him; there is no sense of the need of knowing Him. A man may have mastered the literature of Christianity, the evidences of Christianity, the social and historic aspects of Christianity, and yet not know it;—his own need of it, what it really has to give him. He is without the moral perceptions and enthusiasms to which it speaks; the sense of personal guilt, the yearning for goodness; the desire to be of real service to others; the sense of the mysterious happiness yet awfulness of life. To him therefore the Christian Creed is only "as the sound of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument." Until he feels the reality of his moral needs, of his sin and of his weakness, he will not

be keen in looking out for truth, or anxious to make the most of it.

Not that we are to suppose St. Philip's imperfect knowledge of our Lord at this time was due to all of these causes; or necessarily to any of them. Every soul has its own history, and general descriptions are at best a clumsy substitute for real knowledge of that which each of us knows (if we do know it) only for himself, and which is never exactly repeated. But Jesus Christ speaks to all the ages, to all who hear within themselves the echo of His Divine voice: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?" Do we really know Him? Is He to us more than a collection of texts, than a collection of phrases, than an ideal object of fine sentiment, than a personage of famous memory? Is He a living Person? Do we think of Him in His unseen glory as often, and with the same sense of practical interest, as we think of our nearest relations, of father and mother, brothers and sisters, wife and children? What do we do that we should not do, what do we leave undone that we should certainly do, if we had never heard of Him, or were to discover (horrible as the thought must be to a Christian) that His religion was untrue? A question this, my brethren, of unspeakable importance to all of us at this moment; but the full meaning of which we shall only know in another world. May God, Who is ever ready to help and save us, give us each and all grace patiently to consider and honestly to answer it.

SERMON XXII.

THE GAINS OF THE ASCENSION.

St. John xvi. 7.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away.

EACH of the three last Gospels in the Easter season anticipates the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. Two Sundays ago we read that saying which caused the Apostles so much concern, "A little while, and ye shall not see Me"—that is, in the sepulchre,—"and again a little while, and ye shall see Me"—that is, during the Forty days—"because I go to the Father." And to-day we hear the rapid survey of His whole earthly life, from the moment of the Annunciation to the moment of the Ascension. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father." And in last Sunday's Gospel, to which we will again revert this afternoon, the effect of the announcement of the coming departure on the minds of the disciples is vividly described. They were thrown into deep depression; but they did not venture to ask our Lord the exact meaning of His words: "Now I go My way unto Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts." And then,—"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away."

This reason certainly must have appeared even more

strange to the Apostles than the original announcement. "Expedient for you." Surely they must mishear Him. Did He not say, "expedient for Me"? That would be intelligible. It might be well for Him to exchange the life of toil and suffering for the life of glory. It might be well for Him that He should return to that home of peace and light which in His pity for men He had voluntarily left. But how could it be expedient for those whom He was leaving? If His visible presence, His teaching, His companionship had been an incalculable blessing to them, how could the withdrawal of that blessing be expedient? This embarrassment of the disciples would have been at least natural: it was the outcome of their loyalty and of their love.

Our Lord answers their misgivings immediately: "It is expedient," He says, "that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." In some way the coming of the Holy Spirit was connected with, dependent on, the Ascension of our Lord. Of course, the relation between the Eternal Son and the Divine Spirit which is implied in the words "I will send Him unto you," and which consists in the truth that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son," existed while our Lord was upon the earth, as much as at any period before or afterwards. But it may have been, in the Divine counsels, agreeable to the general scheme and purpose of God in redeeming and sanctifying us, that our Lord's intercession in heaven should precede the descent of the Spirit; that this great and world-renewing gift might be felt to be the first-fruits of that resistless pleading at the Right hand of the Father Almighty. "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." And if this connection existed, as Scripture seems plainly to teach, between our Lord's Ascension and the gift of the Spirit, it

certainly was expedient for the Apostles that He should go away. During His ministry He was to His disciples only an outward presence; a form which they saw, a voice to which they listened, an influence, a rule, to which, however imperfectly, they yielded obedience. But at Pentecost He became by His Spirit an inward presence, a fire, a force, a fount of new thought, new feeling, new resolve, new life,—a fulfilment of that promise made to the prophet and recalled by the Apostle, that as the crowning glory of the New Covenant God would dwell in the hearts of His people.[1] The outward visible loss was immense when the soil of earth was no longer trodden by the Blessed Feet of the Redeemer. But the inward and spiritual gain was so great as to outweigh it; the presence of Christ in the minds, and hearts, and wills of the Apostles, meant illumination, impulse, power, of a kind and on a scale unimagined before. Those dull, cold, irresolute peasants, with their narrow range of vision, their contracted sympathies, their enfeebled wills, were now to become men of light, and love, and purpose, so altogether exceptional as to enable them to essay the conversion of the world.

But the Apostles were representative men; in speaking to them our Lord Jesus Christ addressed the Church of all time. And it is a practical question to ask why His Ascension is so expedient, not only for those who were to benefit, in the first instance, by the gift of the Spirit, but, to pass nineteen centuries at a bound, for us of to-day.

I.

Now, one reason of the expediency of the Ascension which must strike a modern believer in our Lord Jesus

[1] Cf. Jer. xxxi. 33; 2 Cor. vi. 16.

Christ, is that it secures to him an adequate sense of the true place and dignity of man among the creatures of God. There are several lines of thought, nay, there are some great studies, which, at least as they are sometimes handled, tend to create a degraded and false idea of man.

It is a bright starlit night, and we are walking in the country arm-in-arm with an astronomer. "Look," he says, "at the North Star; the light which falls on your eye left it some thirty years or more ago, just when Louis Napoleon had founded the Second Empire by his *coup d'état.* Yet this light travels at a rate of some 222,000 miles a second, and you may thus calculate the regions of space which it must have traversed. Or look at that white band which crosses the heaven, and which our peasants call the Milky Way. That is a collection of worlds more numerous than the sand on the sea-shore, stretching away into the infinite, and separated often from each other by distances which figures cannot express. Among these are stars, so it is said on high authority, whose light must have taken even thousands of centuries in order to reach us on this earth. Or look at the Dog-star, Sirius, how he

> 'Alters hue,
> And bickers into red and emerald.'

Well, Sirius is a sun; he is about a hundred millions of millions of miles away from us. His diameter probably exceeds that of our sun ten times; and his volume, therefore, a thousand times. When it was first known that our own sun, with all his attendant planets, was moving round some other centre, just as our earth moves round him, it was a shock to thought; but this giant sun Sirius, compared with which our own is a pigmy, is, it seems to be certain, himself in motion, probably around some central orb, the size, and place, and distance of which exhaust the capacities of imagination. Truly we are but on the fringe of the infinities; the further our telescopes enable us to gaze,

the further are we from any prospect of reaching a limit." And then our friend turns our thoughts, or we ourselves turn them, upon this little home of ours—the earth,—a scarcely perceptible planet, a smaller satellite of a sun which itself moves round some unknown centre. "The day was," he says, "when men believed this little earth to be the centre of the universe; the sun was conceived of by devout peasants as rising over the eastern hills and setting in the west by a motion of his own; the stars were but the ornaments of the heavens which canopied the home of man; and in their movements man fancied that he could read the secrets of his petty destiny. Nature did but exist, so it was thought, to form a palace in which man might dwell; and it was natural that he should think of himself, in those days of ignorance, as the first of creatures. Astronomy has told him many things, and, amongst others, his own insignificance."

Or again, Comparative Physiology takes us into one of its museums, and we see ranged before us the skeletons of the various families of the apes. "On one side they sink away almost into regular quadrupeds; on the other the higher anthropoids are scarcely if at all distinguishable from man. Look at the lower types of the human family,—the Ahetas, the Papuans; mark the protruding jaw, the sunken and receding forehead, and then say how you can trace a sharp line of demarcation between this animal and that animal,—excepting such as man's historical conceit may have imagined, until his science obliged him to abandon it."

Or, again, we picture to ourselves the scenes in London two centuries ago during the plague, or those scenes which inevitably take place after a great engagement,—after Solferino or Gravelotte. Thousands of human bodies are thrown pell-mell into large pits, and hastily covered up with lime and soil; and as our thought lingers over this

scene of ghastly ruin, Chemistry passes by and suggests that all is well;—that those buried and disfigured forms will presently be resolved into their constituent elements, to enter hereafter, in whatever way, into new organisms; that each human life is but a transient incident in the eternal process of combination and dissolution and recombination which is going on around us; and that the value of man may be appreciated, when we have discovered what remains after a human body has been submitted to the verdict of a chemical student in his laboratory.

Certainly most of us do not acquiesce readily in these theories of human life. Our reason tells the astronomer that there is a moral as well as a material world, and that bulk and distances are not the only or the main tests of greatness with the Being Who made them. And it tells the comparative anatomist that no similarity of skeletons can obliterate the vast interval which parts a being with a self-reflecting consciousness, with reason, with free-will, from a being which is only governed by instinct. And as for the chemist, whether he is in the cemetery or the laboratory, reason protests to him that his analysis begs a tremendous question,—the question, namely, whether the most important and vital part of man has ever been before him to be analysed at all.

But a Christian falls back upon a distinct fact, which makes him listen with interest and sympathy to all that the astronomer, or the physiologist, or the chemist may have to tell him, and withal to preserve a robust faith in the dignity of man. He believes in the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven. Somewhere in space he knows there is at this moment, intimately and for ever associated with the glories of the Self-existent Deity, a human body and a human soul—ay, on the throne of the universe. This is what St. John saw in the clear rapture of the Apocalyptic vision;—"in the midst of the throne a

Lamb as it had been slain."[1] No other creature of God shares that incomparable dignity; the highest intelligences of heaven are bent low in adoration before the exalted Humanity of Jesus. If His Ascension had done nothing else, it would have sustained in believers, to the end of time, faith in the dignity of which human nature is capable, and which it actually enjoys.

II.

But the expediency of the Ascension is further traceable in the effect which it may produce upon life and character, by making room, so to put it, for faith in Christ, and by colouring the whole character of distinctly Christian worship. Let me beg your particular attention.

(*a*) It is of course conceivable that a Being such as our Lord might have willed to prolong His life upon the earth far beyond the common measure of human years, nay, through the centuries of Christian history. Had He done so, there would have been no questions as to the seat and centre of authority in the Christian Church, or as to the true area and contents of the Christian Creed. Had He done so, there would have been ever before the eyes of men a living Example, without any discoverable failure or flaw in it, of what the Christian character was meant to be. Had He done so, we may conjecture, though of course we cannot know, that the conversion of the world would have been completed long ere this, and that the internal strength and union of a world-embracing Church would have promised a future for Christianity of which we cannot as yet dream. But however this might or might not have been, one thing is certain, that if Christ our Lord had continued to be visibly present among men, there would have been no room for faith in Him. Trust

[1] Rev. v. 6.

in Christ there might have been; we trust our friends, our elders, those whom we see and know and respect. But faith, which is, as the Apostle says, the "evidence of things not seen," requires the removal, or at least the invisibility, of its object. We have faith in the inward part of the Holy Eucharist; we see the outward sign. The sight of an object makes faith in it, in this sense, impossible; and we Christians "walk by faith, and not by sight."[1] Had our Lord Jesus Christ continued to live visibly among men, there would have been room for faith in the Invisible Father and in the Invisible Spirit: but for faith in the Man Christ Jesus there would have been no room, since He would have been an object of experience.

And think what this would have meant for Christendom. Why is it that so great a place is assigned to faith in the New Testament? Because faith means nothing less than the movement, the straining of the whole man, moral and intellectual, towards its object, and if that object be perfect, towards a perfect Object. Faith is not separable, except in idea, from love, or from resolution: a faith which is thus divorced from these is dying or dead. Faith is the apprehension of an object, with ever-increasing clearness of perception and tenacity of purpose on the part of the whole soul, its thought, its heart, its determination. And such an apprehension of a perfect Object, of a perfect Human Life, of One in all respects as we are yet without sin, and seated on the throne of heaven, means vast moral leverage,—it means the real elevation of the whole man who thus has or exerts the faith. We become, all of us, more or less, like that on which we constantly fix our attention. If we look downwards, we become earthly; if upwards, the light of heaven is reflected on our souls, in our countenances. And this effect is proportionate to the

[1] 2 Cor. v. 7.

effort which is made; and as faith is a much less passive act than sight or observation, it draws the soul upwards towards its object, and exerts a serious moral effect upon it. For this, as I have said, there would be no room if our Lord had not ascended into heaven; the world would only have known Christ after the flesh, would have concerned itself with His outward and human form rather than with His true Divinity, and it therefore was expedient that He should go away,—expedient as promoting the moral effect and power of faith.

(β) Still more expedient was our Lord's departure in the interests of worship, as we Christians understand it.

What is the idea of God, which, apart from a revelation, we gain from nature? As we watch the orderly processes, the harmony and movement, the infinitely vast and the infinitely little which the natural world offers to our gaze, we reach the idea of a great Cause or Agent, Who must have given being to the kingdom of matter, and Who works incessantly and inscrutably within it. Creative energy and intelligence, — nature suggests these; it suggests also, but with some drawbacks and obscurities, benevolence. But, so far as nature goes, benevolence is in the background of its suggestion respecting its Author and Master; nature is chiefly suggestive of design, as the outward expression of an Intelligence which must have formed and which presides over all that we see.

Pray observe that nothing is said here as to what nature may and does teach when the light of Revelation has been turned on it: nature may be then a second Bible, in which "the invisible things of God are more than clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made."[1]

[1] Rom. i. 20.

"The world is but Thy mirror, framed to teach
Thy children of the truth behind the veil;
Love's handmaids charm with beauty, charming preach,
And preaching hurry by, bloom but to fail:
And all material things, so passing frail,
Are but her handmaids, walking in disguise:
Upon their earthward side dark shades prevail,
But on the side beheld by Heaven-taught eyes
There is a living light which their true Sun supplies." [1]

The question is not whether nature suggests God,—of that there is no question here,—but whether the conception of Him which, without external assistance, it does suggest, can give much welcome or assistance to religion. It is cold, thin, superficial; it is like the clear sunlight on a frosty day in January: there is no warmth, no colour, no character about it. It may provoke intellectual interest, admiration, wonder; but not passion of any kind, not devotion, not worship. The Deity of pure nature is surveyed by the mind much as nature and its several parts are surveyed,—with interest, awe, astonishment, raised, of course, to a higher degree than nature itself can raise them. But that is all; and that all is not enough to feed and sustain a living religion, though it may very well be accepted by a philosophy.

But we approach God not only through external nature, but through man. Man, unlike nature, has moral character. He has passions and affections, he loves and he hates, he is in himself a world, which for its mystery and beauty and suggestiveness far transcends that outer world of nature in which he dwells. As man turns his eye in upon himself he is attracted, and repelled, and puzzled by turns; he examines, he explores, he is baulked; he again advances, he notes traits, characteristics, symptoms; he moves forward among the shadows projected by his own mysterious nature like a traveller exploring an unknown country, with almost unlimited

[1] Isaac Williams, *The Baptistery*, p. 6.

interest, but with caution, apprehension, fear of what he may suddenly come upon. This is the fascination of a great school of Mental Philosophy, like the Scotch school at the beginning of this century; it invites us to explore the human mind with thoroughness and reverence; and it leaves upon us at parting a conviction, even although based upon a partial experience, that man is far greater than anything else in nature, and that within the secret recesses of his mysterious being there lies the approach towards One infinitely greater than himself. This again is the interest of a great writer like Shakespeare; he is what he is because human nature is what it is, and he represents it with such astonishing accuracy and insight. In his pages, as thought, and emotion, and impulse, and resolve, well up by turns from the depths of human nature, they give us an almost overwhelming idea of what man really is; we are admitted to the secrets of that which is, after all, most intimately ourselves; and yet we feel that complete knowledge is still beyond us; we are sustained throughout by hopes of knowing more; we end by knowing that there is more to be known than here, at least, we shall ever know. And thus through these studies and revelations of what man is, we rise above man,—we begin to understand what is meant by man's being made in the image of God. Yes! man, unlike nature, has character, and through human character we ascend to the Divine. When the Old Testament would teach us the awful attributes of the Self-Existent, it draws upon the ordinary language of uman passion and experience. It describes a Being with human feelings of anger, pity, jealousy, love; and unthinking people suppose that this belongs to a low or primary epoch of religious training, and that a more spiritual and developed conception will be attained in the cold and intangible abstraction which is all that a contemplation of external or non-human nature can supply.

But the Bible, or rather He Who speaks in it, knows what He is about; the Revelation through man is a higher Revelation than the Revelation through nature. It is a revelation of moral character: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," [1]—a Character in Whose love and in Whose justice there is abounding mystery. But here, of course, human nature, as we know it, fallen and distorted, if taken in the average as a guide to the true Character of God, may easily mislead. Pagan Greece peopled its imaginary Olympus with many a dark patch of human passion, with many a degrading trait of human vice, and it might have seemed that the revelation of God in man, which said so much more to man's heart, was yet more misleading than the revelation of God in nature, if One had not appeared, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," [2] in Whom human nature could study itself without a moment's feeling of misgiving—I do not say of degradation or of shame.

"It is expedient for you that I go away." Yes! we understand Him now. It is expedient that perfect humanity should thus be associated on the Throne of Heaven with the Infinite and the Eternal. If we are to give our hearts and wills to the Author and End of our existence, if Christian worship is to be not a coldly calculated compliment, but the outcome of a pure and soul-consuming passion, it is well that on the heights of heaven there should throb to all eternity a human heart—the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and that in the adoration which we pay Him we should know that we are expending the inmost resources of our natures at the feet of the

[1] Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. [2] Heb. vii. 26.

One Being Who has upon them the claim, if I may dare speak thus, of relationship as well as the claim of Deity. And thus in the worship of the Church, inspired on the one hand by an awful sense of the inaccessible majesty of God, and on the other by a trustful, tender passion which has its roots in the consciousness of a human fellowship with its awful Object, we find that which we find nowhere else on earth, and understand the words, "It is expedient for you that I go away."

III.

A last reason for the expediency of our Lord's departure is to be found in its connection with His present and continuous work of intercession in heaven.

A question which Christians ought to ask themselves more often than they do is this: What is our Lord Jesus Christ doing now? Eighteen centuries and a half have passed since He left the earth: how has He been occupied? Those who dare to speak of Him only as a great name in history would have their own way of answering this question. Christians at least cannot join them; nor can they entertain the idea, that although still existing, Christ is unconscious. At His Ascension we know He entered upon a course of action just as conscious and deliberate as any in His earthly life. "He sat down at the Right Hand of God." He "sat down,"—so human language would express His full assumption of Kingly dignity, the state of glory on which He has entered, the protection which He henceforth extends to us His subjects. But the phrase also implies a contrast. He has entered, so the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us, into the Holiest Presence as the High Priest of Christendom. But while every Jewish priest stood daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices which could never take

away sins, "this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."[1] It is the posture, not merely of the enthroned Monarch of heaven, but of the omnipotent Priest. He does not stand to plead; still less does He prostrate Himself side by side with those highest beings around the throne. He sits, in His wounded but glorified humanity, as the One Sacrifice, which will for ever avail before the All-Holy. His very presence is itself an intercession; the Father is well pleased in His beloved Son; He beholds, as St. Augustine says, the wounds of the Redeemer, and pardons the sins of the redeemed. This is the nature of the intercession which He ever liveth to make for us; He has entered "into heaven itself, now to appear"—mark that expression—"in the presence of God for us."[2] And therefore, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous";[3] "it is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us."[4]

This uninterrupted action of our glorified Redeemer should surely be more in our minds than it commonly is. When we are parted from a near relative whom we dearly love upon this earth, we try to follow him in thought, in his various occupations through the hours of the day; we picture to ourselves as best we may the scenes in which he is moving; we accompany his thoughts, his words, his looks, so far as love and imagination between them enable us to do so. But how little do we thus think and act with respect to our Lord! What was He doing when we each one of us came into this world? Interceding. What will He be doing, at the moment, known already to Him, when we, each one of us,—perhaps in agony,—shall be leaving it? Interceding. How was He engaged during

[1] Heb. x. 11, 12.
[2] Heb. ix. 24.
[3] 1 St. John ii. 1.
[4] Rom. viii. 34.

the long hours of last night, or when we rose from sleep this morning? what will He be doing when we again lie down? what is He doing now, while I am speaking for Him, and while you listen? The answer is ever the same; there is no change, no suspension, no relaxation of His love-inspired activity: He is ever interceding.

Now, this intercession of His is the very strength of our Christian life. We claim its power in every prayer, when we say, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." We associate our poor feeble prayers with His majestic pleading. We claim it in every Communion, when we present before the Father the one finished Sacrifice which is being pleaded by the Divine Victim Himself, without ceasing, in the heavens. It is the knowledge that this great work, on which Jesus Christ our Lord entered at His Ascension, proceeds uninterruptedly that makes hope and perseverance possible, when hearts are failing, and temptation is powerful, and the sky is dark and lowering. Surely it was expedient for us that He should go away.

Thursday next will be the yearly festival of His Ascension into heaven; and for some who bear His name, we must fear, it will be very much like any other day in the year. Some persons would perhaps say that its observance is only a question of Church order,—of regulating life by the Church calendar. This might be the case if Jesus Christ were only a memory of the past; if paying due honour to the great facts of His appearance upon this earthly scene, and His work in it, and of His departure from it, were only a matter of antiquarian or poetical feeling.

My brethren, we do not thus treat family or personal anniversaries. The day of our own birth, the day of our marriage, the day of a father or a mother's death, the day on which our first child was born: these things are real to us, and we remember them as human nature suggests

to each of us. And a Christian, to whom Jesus Christ our Lord is a real Being—as real as his parents, his wife, his child—will mark the great days which recall the successive steps of Christ's life and work, at least as naturally and as earnestly as the great days of his own personal and family experience. He needs not to wait for the Church's order; her hint, her suggestion is enough. His true Christian feeling, like that other disciple on Easter morning, outruns the rules of rubrics, and comes first, on Thursday next to the Mount of the Ascension. He finds, indeed, in the Prayer-Book, that with Psalms and Lessons and Preface and Creed proper to the festival, Ascension Day ranks, liturgically speaking, with Christmas Day and Easter and Whit-Sunday. But his faith and love had told him no less than this before; the day on which Christ ended His self-manifestation in time by a triumphal ascent to heaven,—the day on which He entered on the solemn work which proceeds uninterruptedly until the Judgment,—is, for a serious believer, on a level with the greatest day in his year.

Of late an effort has been made, in London, to honour our Lord by a better observance of this great day. Let us second this effort, as best we may, next Thursday. If we have any real hold upon the truth which it commemorates year by year, there will be no need for exhortations. For Ascension Day is the festival of our Lord's completed restoration to His rightful glories; it is the crowning act of the triumph which began on Easter morning. It is also the festival of our own humanity, in a far higher sense than any of which Positivism can dream:—when the representative Prince and Flower of our race is thus enthroned in heaven, we feel its original and inalienable dignity. It is the festival of Christian worship, because it presents to us the Unseen Object of worship associated henceforth with a sinless Manhood that claims, not merely

the cold appreciation of the reason, but also the deep and passionate homage of the heart. It is the festival once more of the Perpetual Intercession of Jesus; the strength of the soul's life hour by hour, day by day; the warrant of the soul's hope for the eternal future. No doubt it is a day for bright thoughts, and looks, and words; but it is also a day for solemn communion with the Most Holy in the Sacrament of His love, for review of our personal relations with an ever-interceding Lord, for one deep gaze, if it may be, into the eternal heights and depths that are before and around us. Let us each, so far as our circumstances allow, do our best to hallow it; so may we discover, in an enhanced sense of the great gift of possessing human life, in our renewed perception of the meaning and privilege of Christian worship, and in a fresher consciousness of our debt to our ever-interceding Lord,—in short, in the secret depths of a true personal experience,—the echo of the solemn and pregnant words: "It is expedient for you that I go away."

SERMON XXIII.

THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON THE WORLD.

ST. JOHN xvi. 8.

And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

IN to-day's[1] Gospel our Lord is speaking, just before His own Death, of the work of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, Who was to descend on the Apostles when He Himself had ascended into heaven. "If I depart," says our Lord, "I will send Him unto you; and when He is come, He will reprove," or convince, "the world." And this passage is chosen for to-day's Gospel, because Whitsuntide is now drawing on, and it is time to begin to think what blessings we owe to the coming of the Holy Spirit, that we may the better enter, heart and soul, into the joy of the Whitsun festival.

Observe here that the Holy Spirit is to do a certain work in or for the world. And by "the world," in passages like this is meant, of course, not the world of nature,—not even the entire human race—but mankind so far as it is generally opposed to the Mind of God. The word "world," in this sense, is not merely a description, it is an implied condemnation; it means human life so far as it is in opposition to the life of Jesus Christ and His true followers. See how this presumed opposition runs through our Lord's sayings about the world. "Ye," He says

[1] The Fourth Sunday after Easter.

to His disciples, "are not of the world, even as I am not of the world": "if ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."[1] Again, in His prayer to the Father: "I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine."[2] Again, to the disciples: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you."[3] Again, speaking of the Crucifixion: "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice."[4] Again, He refers to the Holy Comforter as "the Spirit of truth, Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him, but ye," My disciples, "know Him, for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."[5] Observe how much our Lord says to His disciples about the blessings which they would receive from the coming of the Comforter. With them the Comforter Whom the world cannot receive shall abide for ever. Jesus Himself would send the Comforter to them from the Father. The Comforter would teach them all things. He would bring all the past sayings of Christ to their remembrance. He in them would testify of our Lord Jesus Christ. He would take of the words and works of Christ and show the true meaning of them unto them. He would guide them into all the truth. He would show them things to come. The disciples were within the circle of His direct and most effective action; and yet it appears He had something to do for those outside. He was not going to leave "the world" entirely to itself, because it could not receive Him, because it neither saw nor knew Him. He would not, indeed, shed on it the higher gifts of prophecy, illumination, and guidance into all the truth; He would not be to the world an abiding presence. He would

[1] St. John xvii. 16; xv. 19. [2] *Ib.* xvii. 9. [3] *Ib.* xiv. 27.
[4] *Ib.* xvi. 20. [5] *Ib.* xiv. 17.

hover around it, teaching it just what it could bear, reproving it by the new or awakened convictions which He would create in it; reproving it, by convincing it that sin, and righteousness, and judgment, which it had vaguely talked about for ages, were solemn realities. "He shall convince,"—not without reproof (that is the sense of the word),—"He shall convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

I.

See here, first of all, the work of the Holy Spirit upon the Jewish world of the age of the Apostles.

It is natural to ask, to what particular sin, to what righteousness, to what judgment, was our Lord immediately referring? This question is answered by His own words immediately afterwards: "Of sin, in that they believe not on Me; of righteousness, in that I go to the Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, in that the prince of this world is judged."

(*a*) The Jewish world of that generation was to be convinced of one particular sin, the sin of not believing in our Lord Jesus Christ when He presented Himself before it. "Of sin, in that they believe not on Me." Unbelief, then, at any rate such unbelief as that of the Jews who heard and saw our Lord, is sin according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not merely a variety of mental persuasion, differing only from faith in that it rejects that which faith accepts. It is not merely an act of the mind. It is an act of the will, and an act of a perverse character. It is not a misfortune, like a fever caught in an infected house, or an accident incurred when travelling by the railway. We cannot help these things; they come upon us from without, and we are their victims. But a man can help believing what he does

believe, and disbelieving what he does not believe, at any rate within large limits; that is, he is originally responsible for being in the state of soul which in the end rejects or accepts the truths of faith. Faith, according to our Lord's teaching, is a test of a man's moral nature; faith, like unbelief, is itself as much a moral as a mental act. We believe, partly at any rate, that which our moral nature makes us wish to believe; we disbelieve, partly at any rate, that which, as we foresee, will involve unwelcome results for us, being morally such as we are. The Jews had overwhelming evidence before them to show that Jesus Christ was the Christ promised in their own prophets; but they did not wish to believe in a Teacher Who had made them dissatisfied with themselves, and was likely to make them still more so; and accordingly they did not believe in Him. Their wills were more than able to overmaster their understandings; and so our Lord's teaching and works went for nothing with them, or rather, only enhanced their guilt. "If," He said, "I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father."[1]

Here, then, we see the destined work of the Holy Ghost in the Jewish world of that generation. He did not add to the proof which was there to warrant faith in the claims of Jesus Christ; He moved as a softening influence upon the hard wills and hearts of the Jewish people. He suggested to them a doubt whether they really had been simply wishing to get at the truth; whether they had dealt fairly with the appeal to their own history and Scriptures which had been made to them. This influence of the Spirit was far from being irresistible;

[1] St. John xv. 22, 24.

the majority of the people still treated it as they had treated the voice and presence of Christ: they set it aside. But with some it was otherwise:—with Apollos, with Gamaliel, with Aquila and Priscilla, with the band of converts whom St. Paul calls "the remnant according to the election of grace."[1] Nay, on the day of Pentecost itself, when the Holy Spirit had just descended on the Apostles, St. Peter, first among them in place, but hitherto, at any rate, weakest in purpose, so convinced those of his countrymen who listened to him, of the greatness of their sins against the Love of God manifested in the Divine Redeemer, that they "were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"[2] The words which they heard with their outward ears were seconded by the whispers of the Inward Teacher, and men whose hands were yet red with the Blood of the Crucifixion melted into tears of penitence and faith.

(β) And the Jewish world of that generation had to be convinced of righteousness—the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. "He shall convince the world of righteousness; because I go to the Father, and ye see Me no more." The Jews knew what righteousness was, but they had persistently asserted that our Lord was not righteous. They said that He was a sinner, and that God would not hear His prayers. They explained His miracles by saying that He was in league with Beelzebub. They denounced, as blasphemy, His claim to be what He really was; and when He was put to a shameful death they regarded this as a proof vouchsafed from Heaven that they were right. "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"[3] was the title which they read on the Cross, as confirming their own estimate of Him.

It is very difficult to shake a bitter prejudice like this,

[1] Rom. xi. 5. [2] Acts ii. 37. [3] Deut. xxi. 23; Gal. iii. 13.

especially when it has assumed anything like national proportions. It is proof against argument, against entreaty, against all the ordinary methods of persuasion, against any purely human influence, when it has been strengthened and embittered by long controversy. True, Jesus Christ had risen from His grave in vindication of His claims and of His character; but our everyday experience may teach us that a fact, however clearly attested, has no sort of influence with persons who have made up their minds not to accept a consequence which necessarily follows from it. The Jews had closed their eyes to the significance of Christ's Life, and they had no difficulty in inventing explanations to dispose of an unwelcome event like His Resurrection, followed by His Ascension into heaven.

"I go to the Father, and ye see Me no more." This was nevertheless the fact upon which the Spirit, whispering to the hearts of thousands of Jews, would dwell. That mysterious, triumphant departure of Jesus Christ,—the real character of which could be falsified by no accumulation of vulgar reports,—what did it mean? Did it not recall all that had preceded it,—the "words such as never man spake"; the acts, each of them the best possible at the moment, each of them without a flaw; the one Life on earth in which the Will of the Father had been perfectly mirrored? Was it not, after all, in harmony with [such a Life as this? The past rose up before them in memory, and the Holy Spirit breathed on it, set it in its true light, discovered its drift and meaning. They still saw what they had seen before, but with new eyes. Thus Christ was justified, or recognised as righteous, in the Spirit, and believed on in the world, after He had been received up into glory.[1] Here, too, there was no compulsion: the Spirit would not save

[1] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

the Jewish world from its worst prejudices against its will. Men might if they would—numbers did—go on asserting, with a passionate vehemence intended to silence insurgent questions, their persuasion of the unrighteousness of Jesus. But the Holy Spirit had His triumphs; He was at work in that very assembly which listened to Stephen, and which condemned him to death for proclaiming the "Just One," of Whom they had been now the betrayers and murderers.[1] It was this rising but unwelcome conviction of the real righteousness of the Crucified, brought home to them by the silent Divine Teacher Who seconded the words which fell on their ears, that "cut the judges of Stephen to the heart."[2] It was this which sowed the seed that grew up in the soul of Saul of Tarsus, and changed him from being (in his own words) "a blasphemer and a persecutor"[3] into a "teacher of the nations in faith and verity."[4] And for St. Paul his Master's lofty righteousness was not merely or chiefly a glory of his Master's character; it was a treasure in which he too, reaching out for it the hand of faith, might himself have part. Taught by the Spirit, he learnt to despise his own righteousness, which was of the law,—that poor measure of obedience which was all he could compass without the grace of Christ,—and to prize this higher and perfect righteousness of his Lord as a robe to cover his own deficiencies, as a gift which was to renew his being from within. "Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."[5]

(γ) And once more. The Jewish world of that day had to be convinced of the reality of judgment. The Jews admitted it in words; just as they were very familiar with the language of their Scriptures about sin and

[1] Acts vii. 52. [2] *Ib.* 54. [3] 1 Tim. i. 13. [4] *Ib.* ii. 7. [5] Phil. iii. 9.

righteousness. But they did not believe that they would be judged;—that God was judging them. The judgments on which they loved to dwell were God's great judgments on the enemies of Israel in bygone centuries. Judgment was with them a matter of historical interest, perhaps of national pride; they did not think of it as an impending or present thing for which it behoved them to be prepared. Certainly there were signs in the heaven above and in the earth beneath, in the world of thought and in the world of politics, which might have been read even by unobservant eyes as portending coming change and disaster. But to these warnings the eyes of the Jewish world were closed. As we know from the proceedings at our Lord's trial, they resented any expression, although misunderstood, which seemed to them to imply that their temple was not to go on for ever; they had no doubt at all that what was really before them was a time, not of judgment, but of splendid and abundant triumph.

The Holy Spirit was to convince the Jewish world of the reality of future judgment, in that the prince of this world was judged. The unseen personal spirit of evil, who had the power of death, was judged by God when death was conquered by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Satan had done his utmost, at the Birth of Christ, at the Temptation, at each step in the Ministry, at the closing scenes of the Passion, to frustrate the work of the Divine Redeemer among men. Satan from the first struggled to rid himself of an Enemy Who threatened the independence and integrity of his own kingdom of unrighteousness. Therefore he entered into the heart of the traitor Judas; therefore he stirred up the chief priests and Pharisees against our Lord; therefore he roused the passions of the people to cry, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" "This is your hour," said our Lord, "and the power of darkness."[1]

[1] St. Luke xxii. 53.

But at the Resurrection Satan like lightning fell from the heaven of empire. Jesus Christ went upon the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon He trod under His feet. All the social combinations, all the pedantic speculations, all the passionate resolves which had for the moment triumphed on Calvary, now faded away as though they had never been. As our Lord said in a former review of the issue of the conflict, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."[1] The prince of this world was judged.

We Christians see this clearly enough now, in the light of the past; but to see it then, to see it through the thick brushwood of ancient prejudice which shut out the sunlight from the mind of a Jew, was no easy matter, it was beyond the reach of ordinary human keen-sightedness. It was the unseen Teacher, the Divine and Eternal Spirit, acting with and through the teaching of the Apostles, Who put the Resurrection before the minds of men in its true light, as the decisive turning-point in the great struggle between good and evil, as the judgment of the prince of this world. In this one victory lay the strength and promise of victories to come, of what St. Paul calls "the pulling down of strongholds,"[2]—strongholds of prejudice, strongholds of error, strongholds of self-interest. Here was the earnest of the coming collapse of the idolatry of the Pagan empire, to be achieved after three centuries of martyrdom. But here also was the warning of a nearer judgment of which the Jewish world must be convinced. In less than half a century the legions of Titus would be encamped around the sacred city; and the Blood which had been shed on Calvary would be remembered, all too late, amid the ruin and despair of Jerusalem.

[1] St. Luke xi. 21, 22. [2] 2 Cor. x. 4.

II.

But our Lord's words about sin, righteousness, and judgment have a wider scope than this. They suggest to us the three moral ingredients of healthy public opinion in a Christian country. Every society, every nation, has its public opinion, its common stock of hopes, fears, prejudices, likings, enthusiasms, repugnances, tastes, points of view,—the common stock to which all contribute something, and by which in turn all are influenced. The old-world cities, each of them, had a public opinion of its own,—Rome, and Athens, and Jerusalem; and now too, wherever men meet and exchange thoughts, and know themselves to be bound to each other by the ties of race, or of common interests, or of historical associations, there grows up inevitably a common fund of thoughts and phrases which may be barbarous or enlightened, as the case may be, but which is always influential. Like the smoke and vapours which hang visibly in the air over every large centre of human life, to which every hearth contributes something, and by which every window is more or less shaded, so in the world of public thought and feeling there is a like common product of all the minds which think and feel at all, which in turn influences more or less all the contributors to it. And what I am now insisting upon is, that this inevitable product and accompaniment of human society,—public opinion,—if it is Christian, must contain a recognition of the three solemn facts—sin, righteousness, judgment.

(*a*) Of sin, when left to itself, the world at large has no adequate idea, often no idea whatever. The world knows and speaks only of faults, offences, failures, mistakes, misconduct. It does not speak of sins; it avoids the word. It recognises the existence of moral evil; it cannot

help doing that, because moral evil threatens to break up society, to destroy law, to make life unendurable. But the world at large has an eye to these effects, it does not look at the nature of the cause which produces them. Sin is only moral evil set in the light of the law and love of God. Generally speaking, men place moral evil in some feebler light,—the light of human law, the light of personal obligation, the light of the sense of self-respect, the light of the judgment of the respectable, the light of common sense.

(β) In the same way the world has no true idea of righteousness, though it uses and respects the word. It means by righteousness conformity to human right, respect for human laws, external propriety, respectability. It has no idea of a righteousness which is an affair of motives, which is, when out of sight, much more than it is when it meets the eye, which cares only for the approval of the Father Which seeth in secret, which will sometimes defy public opinion and current ideas of respectability,—defy human laws, in defence of a higher right disclosed to conscience.

(γ) Nor has the world any true idea of judgment. Judgment is for most men a remote contingency,—too remote to be made a subject of practical calculations; it is a dim and far-off conception, recognised as necessary for the ideal discipline of the world, but not taken into account as embodied in a coming event with which, one by one, we have to reckon.

Now the Holy Spirit, acting through the teaching of the Christian Church, and the social influence of men who are under His guidance, is continually enriching this poor and degraded public opinion, at least in countries where the Church of Christ is found, by a new and truer estimate of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. The Holy Spirit, penetrating into the dark places of national opinion, is like a light borne into a cavern, re-

vealing dangers beneath the feet, revealing beauties at the sides and overhead, enabling the explorer to discover what is before him. From age to age the Holy Spirit, employing the ascendancy of men of high character and authority as His instruments,—men who have the moral as distinct from the merely material interests of their country at heart,—is deepening and sharpening the public sense of sin. Thus the national conscience of one generation is tolerant of evils which the next disallows; and although there is a reverse side to this, and, in some cases,—as in that of our new law of divorce,—a nation takes a distinctly retrograde step, yet, upon the whole, the national conscience becomes more sensitive to the perpetration of national wrong; it is convinced of sin. In the same way, the Holy Ghost lights up in the conscience of a country the idea of righteousness,—teaches men to distinguish real greatness from fictitious greatness, the greatness of character from greatness of position, to rate simplicity and disinterestedness and quick sympathy with the wronged, more highly than mere brilliancy or success, combined with good-natured indifference to principle. Above all, He teaches nations to believe that God has not left them to themselves, that He takes account of their corporate acts, that His hand, stretched out for judgment, is to be seen in events which had hitherto looked to them like the natural products of natural causes. In a word, the work of the Spirit upon public opinion is to suggest a new and higher point of view; to make men look with new eyes at contemporary events; to enhance the unseen and the moral at the cost of the visible and the material; to suggest the transcendent importance of eternal interests when balanced against those which belong to time. There is much also, of a very different kind, in the public opinion of every Christian country,—conspicuously of this country; but the contribution to it which is made by the

Holy Spirit, through the influence of the Christian Church and of good Christians, is the salt which saves the nation from perishing of sheer corruption.

And hence we see the great responsibility of all, whether in lowly stations or in high, who have any means of influencing for good the public opinion of their countrymen. The words we utter or write, each and all of us, do contribute something towards the total result. Are we organs of the Spirit, raising the moral standard of our time, convincing the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment? Or are we merely reflecting and repeating the more selfish and degrading elements of contemporary thought? are we echoing its appeals to bad passions and unworthy prejudices, its indifference to questions of right and duty when balanced against material interests, real or imaginary? At all times in a nation's history this is a serious question, but especially at a time like the present,[1] when the most thoughtless must feel that we are living in presence of great events, and taking our first steps towards an unknown but momentous future. Let us, while thankfully recognising God's great gifts to England of a unique position in the world, not forget that, whether for men or nations, no material interests, no sway of empire, no historical prestige, even if these could be threatened, are worth deliberate complicity with barbarous tyranny and wrong; that the highest interests of a country are its hatred of evil, its love of righteousness, its faith in God's judgment; that, in a word, "righteousness," as distinct from a spirited policy, "exalteth a nation,"[2] and will alone stand its sons in good stead, in the coming times, and in the Great Hereafter.

In this exterior action of the Spirit upon the public opinion and conscience of a nation, we see the source of that elevation of character which is sometimes to be found

[1] A war was expected between England and Russia. [2] Prov. xiv. 34.

in men who own no allegiance to Jesus Christ. When men of this kind are named, it is not uncommon to hear the remark that, after all, it does not matter much whether a country has or has not a faith, because here is a citizen who, morally speaking, does so well without one, who is so generous, self-sacrificing, noble-minded, unselfish. But the question is,—Whence did he get these things? They came to him from the indirect influence of the very faith which he abjures. They are detached fragments of the truth, deposited, like some jewel in a conglomerate, in the crude mass of public opinion, and he has extracted them—that is all. They are the work of the unseen Teacher of the reality of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. But for Christianity, little as he thinks it, this man would never have been what he is, although he now repudiates his obligations.

Lastly, in the words sin, righteousness, judgment, we name the three governing ideas,—the three moments, so to call them,—of the Christian life. The Spirit Who convinces the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment, carries this threefold conviction with imperious force into the heart of every true Christian.

First in order comes the conviction of sin, of a man's own sins, seen in their number and their magnitude. A Christian knows what sin is; he may fall into it, again and again, but he does not deceive himself as to its nature or its consequences. The Invisible Teacher is close at hand to insist upon the stern truth; and so the true Christian is always on the look-out for sin; he is always struggling with it; his falls do not disguise from him its radical opposition to God and goodness.

Next is the conviction of righteousness. A Christian knows what righteousness is; he has been taught its true standard by the Inward Teacher; he knows a saint when

he sees one, though as yet he may be very far from being a saint himself. He knows that, in the impassioned language of Scripture, any righteousness which could be furnished out of his own resources is, regarded as moral clothing, only "filthy rags," and therefore he looks up to "The Lord our Righteousness,"—to that sinless Saviour Whose righteousness becomes his own when it is claimed by faith, and conveyed through the chartered means of grace granted to the Christian Church.

Above all, the Christian is convinced of judgment. He knows that God is judging him day by day, and that at the Last Day God will judge him finally, and will award him his place in eternity. The thought of this is constantly before him; it colours and shapes his whole idea of the meaning of life and death. To be thus swayed by fear of sin, by love of righteousness, by expectation of judgment, is to be "led by the Spirit"; it is to have passed under the influence of those great creative ideas and truths with which the Spirit was sent down from heaven, that He might purify and fertilise the lives and hearts of men. Brethren, let us pray Him to do His blessed work in us one by one; that while time lasts, and eternity is still future, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus may make us free from the law of sin and death."[1]

[1] Rom. viii. 2.

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